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THE INEVITABLE CHRIST

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Lesson - to kick against the goad

- Kicking AGAINST THE GOAD =

THE DIFFICULTY OF ESCAPING JESUS

ACTS xxvi. 14.—“It is hard for thee to kick against the goad.”

WAS Saul's conversion as sudden as it seemed? Of course, to all outward appearance nothing could have been more sudden or unexpected. It was so sudden that people could not believe that it had really taken place. They could not believe that the man who left Jerusalem to persecute any Christians he might find in Damascus entered the gates of the Syrian city a penitent and humble believer in the Jesus against whom he had raged so furiously. When God's voice bade Ananias go and call on Saul as he sat in his blindness in his lodging in the street called Straight, Ananias at once made objection: “Lord, I have heard from many of this man, how much evil he did to Thy saints at Jerusalem: and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call upon Thy name.” Ananias couldn't believe that the persecutor had turned disciple. It needed a special assurance from God Himself to convince him upon that point. Three years later, when he went up to Jerusalem and tried to join the Church there, they were all afraid

of him. When they had last seen Saul he was their bitterest enemy, he was their fiercest persecutor. They could not believe that in the meantime he had become a disciple. And there is this much to be said in excuse of their scepticism—that Saul, judging again by appearances, was of all men the most unlikely to turn Christian. For he was the head and front of the fierce, bitter, intolerant Pharasaic party which was intent upon exterminating the Christian faith. It was an astounding—almost an incredible—thing that this man should leave Jerusalem a Pharisee and enter Damascus a Christian.

But a thing may seem sudden in its manifestation, and yet there may have been long preparation for it. The actual happening may be instantaneous, and yet it may have been the result of forces which had long been at work. The lightning flash is a sudden, instantaneous thing ; but for hours before it smote the heavens like a sword the dark and menacing clouds filled with storm and tempest had been gathering. Spring sometimes comes upon us with a kind of burst. But even in the winter months the buds are forming which are ultimately to open into leaf. And later on when the more genial winds and rains come the sap will rise, and the trees will clothe themselves in all their spring glory.

OF ESCAPING JESUS

There was a rock at the entrance to New York Harbour which, because of the ships which had wrecked themselves upon it, they called Hell Gate Rock. To make the harbour safe the authorities determined it must be removed. So the engineers got to work upon it. From a dozen different directions they drilled and bored into that rock. Nothing was apparently happening during the months they were busy on that work. But one day somebody touched an electric button which fired the charges which the engineers had laid in the holes they had drilled, and Hell Gate rock went up in a thousand fragments. The outbreak of war in 1914 was, from one point of view, sudden. No one expected it. Tourists from Britain and America thronged the Continent. And yet any one who reads Viscount Grey's *Twenty Years* knows well that it really wasn't sudden. For all those twenty years the forces had been gathering which issued in the explosion of 1914. Behind what we consider sudden events there may be quite a long history. It was like that, I believe, with the conversion of Saul. Dr. Alex. Whyte, in his picturesque way, contends that there was nothing to prepare for the conversion of Saul. "Not only," he says, "had Paul no sense of sin to prepare him for his conversion: he had no preparation and no fitness for his conversion of

any kind whatsoever. He brought nothing in his hands." But this is not only psychologically inconceivable—but it flies in the face of certain specific statements of the Apostle, as, *e.g.*, this, that God had separated him from his mother's womb. And it completely ignores this word addressed to him by Jesus himself: "It is hard for thee to kick against the goad." Saul was kicking against something, and it was as foolish and futile as the ox's kicking against the goad. For the ox did that foolish thing sometimes. Perhaps, as Dr. Glover suggests, Saul had witnessed the scene as he journeyed to Damascus—it tried to shake off the goad and lunged out at the man who had fixed it on its neck, and the only result was to hurt itself with every such kick by coming in contact with the inevitable goad. And Saul, in persecuting Christianity and the Christians, was kicking against something within himself—certain hesitations and questionings and half-formed convictions of his soul. And it was in vain for Saul to try and stifle these questionings and memories and half-formed convictions by flinging himself headlong into the work of persecution. "It is hard for thee," said Jesus, "to kick against the pricks." Now, it is about these memories, questions, and half-formed convictions which had been at work in Saul's soul,

and which prepared the way for that great crisis on the way to Damascus, that I want to speak briefly. What were some of these "pricks" against which Saul had been vainly and desperately kicking?

Here it is

I

I begin with this: (a) His realisation of the impotence of the Law to set him right with God. Paul the Apostle says somewhere that, so far as the Hebrew people were concerned, the Law was their schoolmaster to bring them to Christ. It was Saul's schoolmaster too. It helped to bring him to Christ. And this, not so much by what it did, as by what it *failed to do*. For what the Law failed to do was to set young Saul at peace with God. You get the story of his own spiritual life in that tremendous and tragic seventh of Romans. For what the Law did was to quicken within Saul's soul the sense of sin. Listen to him: "Had it not been for the Law, I would never have known what sin meant. Thus, I would never have known what it is to covet unless the Law had said: 'You must not covet.' When the command came home to me, sin sprang to life and I died. Miserable wretch that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" Now the whole

Interpretation
Paul's

Interpretation
Paul's

Interpretation
Paul's

Interpretation
Paul's

Interpretation
Paul's

object of religion is to reconcile man to God. And the Law wholly failed to do that. Saul had found that out by experience. All that Law did was to make him feel his sin and condemnation. It had no word to speak of pardon and peace. His aching heart cried out for something more—something better. Saul wanted a Saviour—though he perhaps never confessed it, even to himself. He knew the Law had failed, and the fact that he persecuted the people who left the Law for Jesus is no disproof of this. When men are losing faith in a thing but are still unwilling to give it up, they try to stifle their doubts by a more vehement assertion of adherence. We talk about “protesting too much.” Exaggerated protestations often hide waning convictions. “Who lights the fagot?” the poet asks. And he replies: “Not the full faith; no, but the lurking doubt.” Saul was full of lurking doubt—even when persecuting the most fiercely. He knew the Law could bring no peace. That was one of the “pricks” against which he had been vainly kicking.

(b) Then, in the second place, there were his *memories of Jesus*. I do not want to be dogmatic about the question whether Saul ever actually saw Jesus in the flesh. He may quite easily have done. The only argument against the supposition is the argument *e silentio*. In his

letter the Apostle says nothing about anything he ever heard Jesus say or saw Jesus do. And people argue that if Paul had come into direct contact with Jesus, sometime or other he would have been sure to say so. Against that there is to be set the fact that the argument from silence is a proverbially precarious one, and the further fact that the natural reading of that sentence of the Apostle's, "Even though I have known Christ after the flesh, yet now I know Him so no more," would seem to imply that Paul had known Jesus during the days of his earthly ministry. There is absolutely nothing to have prevented it. Paul and Jesus, I should imagine, were, thereabouts, contemporaries, and we know that for his Rabbinical training young Saul went to Jerusalem and sat at the feet of Gamaliel.

But whether he saw and heard Jesus for himself or not, he couldn't have failed to hear about Him. A man would have to be an utter stranger in Jerusalem not to know the things concerning Jesus of Nazareth—and Saul was certainly no stranger. Words of Jesus had passed into current speech. I imagine that such a story as that of the Prodigal Son must have impressed itself upon the popular memory, and have been passed from mouth to mouth. Supposing Saul had heard that story, could it have failed to suggest thoughts about the

(C) Speaker? And then there were His deeds. I don't suppose Saul could have lived in Jerusalem for long without coming in contact with someone whom Jesus had blessed and healed—that man who was born blind, for example. And he certainly could not live there without hearing the astounding story of Lazarus, who was brought to life after he had been in the grave four days. I dare say Saul, like the rest of the Pharisees, tried to dismiss these things by saying it was by the prince of devils Jesus accomplished these miracles. But do you think an honest man could really believe that? And do you think that Saul never had any qualms or doubts as to who Jesus really was? And then there was His death. Of course it was absurd to suggest that the Messiah could die, and die such a death as that of Jesus. But what about Pilate's repeated assertion that he could find no fault in Him? And what about that prayer of His on the Cross: "Father, forgive them"; and that final cry: "Father, into Thy hands I commend my Spirit"? Could Saul resist the feeling that here was a Man like no other that ever trod the ways of earth? He tried to smother it by working up a kind of frantic hatred against the very name of Jesus, but doubts often assailed his soul as to whether the course he was pursuing was not wholly and utterly wrong.

His memories of Jesus were another of the "pricks" against which he had vainly kicked.

(c) And then again, there were the lives which the Christian people lived. For quite obviously they had something which Saul himself had not. They had, indeed, the very thing which he so much desired and which the Law had failed to give him. They had peace with God, and they said quite simply and plainly that it came to them through the Lord Jesus Christ. And that this peace was a real thing was evident from the lives they lived. For they were a happy, singing, rejoicing set of folk. This is what is said of them: "They did take their food with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God and having favour with all the people." And they were brave even under persecution. One thing they would not do—they would go to prison and they would die—but they would not abjure or deny the name of Jesus. And do you imagine that Saul never asked himself whether, after all, these people did not possess the real thing? And do you imagine he never asked himself whether really people would lose liberty and life for a lie? What Saul saw in the lives of Christians raised challenges and questions in his own soul. These also were some of the "pricks" against which Saul so vainly kicked.

(d) And there were other things which the commentators point out, as, *e.g.*, his early training in Tarsus. Was it possible for Saul, bred in Tarsus, a Gentile city, seeing in the gleam of the eyes of some of his Tarsian friends the same hunger for God as filled his own heart—was it possible for Saul really to think that all Gentiles were excluded from the family of God? Did not he find his narrow Jewish creed often challenged by what he saw amongst his acquaintance in Tarsus? And there was his study under Gamaliel. Gamaliel was one of the more liberal and spiritual of the great Jewish Rabbis. He refused to join in the persecution of the Christians, lest he might be fighting against God. He wanted to let time do its testing work upon the new faith. And do you suppose that when Saul was busy haling men and women and casting them into prison and trying to make them blaspheme that that word of his old teacher never recurred to his mind, “Lest we be found to be fighting against God”? Oh! no doubt, Saul smothered the thought. But I believe it constantly obtruded itself. It, again, was one of the “pricks” against which he kicked.

(e) But I pass them by in order to come to what it was that haunted Saul the most

OF ESCAPING JESUS

incessantly, and which continually conjured up these spectres of doubt and questioning which he vainly sought to lay. It was the remembrance of Stephen. To begin with, it was the remembrance of Stephen's words. It was in the synagogue of the Cilicians—Saul's synagogue, that is—that Stephen carried on his brief but tremendous ministry. It was there he proclaimed the Gospel that Jesus had superseded the Law. Saul, I suppose, would be one of those who disputed with Stephen. But neither he nor the others who took part in the debate were able to withstand the wisdom and the Spirit by which Stephen spake. The fact that they could not withstand Stephen only made them the more mad, and it was they who laid the information which finally led to Stephen's trial and death. But do you think a man like Saul could forget? He might refuse to yield to conviction, but could he ever banish from his mind the thought that Stephen was right? And then there was Stephen's death. Saul heartily approved of the death of Stephen, and it was at his feet that the witnesses who had to lead off in the work of stoning laid down their garments. But do you imagine that what he saw and heard then did not have its influence upon him? For what he heard was this: he heard Stephen say, as the stones came crashing down upon him,

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"Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." and he heard him, with a forgiveness wellnigh divine, pray for his murderers, saying, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge." And what he *saw* was this: he saw his face, as it were the face of an angel, with a light and a glory upon it that never shone on sea or land, and he saw him—not die, but fall asleep quietly and confidently as a child who knows night will soon pass and the day will soon break. And do you imagine that had not its effect upon Saul? He could never forget it. He *tried* to forget it by plunging fiercely into the work of persecution. But he could not forget Stephen's face, and he could not forget Stephen's prayer. Could the faith that cast such a glory upon a man's very face, which enabled him to pray such prayers and to die such a death be a falsity? Saul was haunted and pursued by those spectres of the mind which Stephen's dying raised. "If Stephen had not prayed," says St. Augustine, "the Church would never have possessed Paul." And he is not far wrong. Anyhow, Saul could not forget:

Those eyes that looked their last in smiling—
Last on this world here, but their first on God.

And all these things—the failure of the Law, the memories of Jesus, the lives of Christian people, the triumphant death of Stephen, were what

OF ESCAPING JESUS

Mr. Gwilym Griffith calls "the secret goads of God." Yes, Saul tried to persuade himself that he was doing God service in persecuting the Way to the death, but within him there was a self which could be deceived by no casuistry, and whose questionings could not be silenced. When he raged against the Christians it was but to stifle the doubts of his own soul. His unbelief was taking "the wrathful way to faith." His Jewish loyalty was not the unshaken, impregnable thing it appeared to men to be; it had been honeycombed, disintegrated, undermined by these questionings and challenges of his own soul, so that at the mere sight of Jesus it collapsed and fell. The conversion of Saul was at once sudden and long prepared. It was the culmination of a process; and it illustrates the truth that it is vain for any man to kick against the goads of God.

II

But it was not simply that I might trace the hidden and secret processes that culminated in the sudden conversion of Saul that I took this little phrase as my text, but because I thought I saw in it something pertinent to this age of ours. Saul was in full revolt against Christianity. He was a rebel against Christ. So also

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is this age of ours. It is in revolt against the Church, against Christianity, against Christ. One sign of the revolt is that the Church is, to a large extent, neglected. Another sign is that a furious attack is being levelled against the Christian morality. Yet another is that people mock at the Christian faith as being superseded and out of date. And because of the widespread nature of this revolt, good people begin to be doubtful about the future of religion. Now, I do not want to be foolishly optimistic, but I believe the temper of this age of ours is very like that of Saul in his persecuting days. I believe it is rebellious, paradoxical as it may sound, because it is so near to faith. Its loud negations suggest to me secret doubts of its own position. Its repudiations hint at secret longings of the soul. It is noisy in its asseverations to hide from itself its own deep questionings. Like Saul, it is kicking against the pricks. And if you ask me what are the pricks against which this age of ours is kicking, I would mention things like these.

(a) The memories of home. Children may wander far, but they cannot wholly banish memories of home and early days. There may not be many homes now in which family prayer is observed and the Sabbath is kept for worship, but there are many who can remember the homes from

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which they issued and the way in which Christ in such homes was honoured and worshipped. And the memory wakes up sometimes and reminds men of the better part. It is there in our hearts, one of the secret goads of God, and it rebukes us as we go on our foolish and Godless ways. Rebukes us and *appeals* to us! A man came into this church one day: he was a godless and profane person; but he had been trained in a pious home and had been taught in Sunday school. And one day those old memories brought him into this place and Jesus Christ got hold of him. It is vain to kick against that goad! Men cannot forget.

(b) Then there is the vision of *saintly* lives. Men cannot ignore them or make light of them. Such saintly lives are not as common as they ought to be. One reason for the present distress is that professing Christians are so desperately worldly—our lives are so poor and common and ignoble. But real Christian lives are not entirely wanting. And these suffice to challenge the aggressive unbelief of our day. What are we to say to lives like those, let us say, of Josephine Butler, or Catherine Booth, or Francis Paget, or Dan Crawford? By the grace of God, these saints say, we are what we are. Lives like these make honest people wonder whether,

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after all, there isn't something in this religion which they repudiate and deny.

(c) Then there is the Church, much criticised, whose death has been so often prophesied, but which obstinately refuses to die, which, indeed, when it is supposed to be on its death-bed, suddenly shows itself possessed of some mighty supernatural power—the Church which men affect to scorn and repudiate, but which, in spite of everything, shows itself possessed of the power of converting men. When men *think* they cannot escape wondering whether, after all, the Church is not the Church of the living God.

(d) And then there is the figure of *Jesus Himself*. It is significant the way in which people come back to Christ. They simply cannot leave Him alone. Many wish, I dare say, that He wasn't there, that He had never been—but there He is, and they have to account for Him. Many try to explain Him away, to whittle Him down to the limits of ordinary manhood, but somehow or other, in spite of themselves, His greatness and uniqueness force themselves upon them. Men cannot escape Him,

For O, the master is so fair,
His smile so sweet to banished men,
That those who meet Him unaware,
Can never rest on earth again.

The age may be in revolt against Christianity,

but it can never get rid of it. It is vain for it to kick against the goad.

“Hard to kick against the goad!” God has his witnesses and reminders in every heart, and it is hard, to the point of impossibility, to neglect or ignore them. This age seems to have turned its back on religion, but no subject interests it so profoundly. With all its neglect of it, it is uneasily aware that the truth that really matters is in it. For proof of that statement take facts like these: The newspapers have discovered that articles on religion make an appeal like nothing else does. When a certain number of literary men wrote articles on “My Religion” the circulation of the paper which published them leaped upwards by thousands upon thousands. Mr. Dick Sheppard’s book has sold by the hundred thousand, and has been the subject of endless talk. Lives of Christ still pour out of the Press, Mr. Middleton Murry’s being the last. There is something wistful and pathetic in it all. Our age may not be religious—but it can’t ignore or forget religion. It is finding it desperately hard to kick against the pricks.

“It is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.” Hard! We talk sometimes about the difficulties of belief, and I do not deny that the difficulties exist. But the difficulties of unbelief seem to

me to be greater still. A man has to get past the memories of his home; he has to get past the remembrance of Godly parents; he has to get past the fact of saintly lives made such by the grace of God; he has got to get past the witness of his own conscience and the hungers of his own soul; he has to get past Jesus Himself before he can rest in unbelief. And it is hard to do that. Here is Professor Julian Huxley, for instance, trying to give us a religion without God. He can't believe in God—but religion we must have; we cannot do without it. This age of ours, spite of its apparent irreligiousness, cannot do without religion. God has so many reminders that it does not trust its own negations, and it has no confidence in its own doubts and denials. It is hard for it to kick against the goad! And I have a hope that it may be with our age as it was with Saul, that the goads of God may do their full work, and the doubts and denials may vanish as mists before the sun, and our age may soon be at the feet of Jesus crying in adoring worship, "My Lord and my God."

THE UNEXPECTEDNESS OF JESUS

LUKE v. 26.—“And they were filled with fear, saying, We have seen strange things to-day.”

THIS was the kind of comment the people made to one another as they went home after witnessing the miracle of the healing of the paralytic. The Greek word which is translated “strange” is *παράδοξον*, a word which is reproduced in our English word “paradoxical.” The word literally translated means “contrary to opinion” or expectation and almost to belief. That is how Dr. Moffatt translates the sentence. “We have seen incredible things to-day.” I do not know what it was about this incident that specially aroused this feeling of almost incredulous surprise—there were so many startling things about it. There was, first of all, the faith of the four friends, which revealed itself in the strange methods they adopted to bring the paralytic into the presence and under the notice of Jesus. When they could not get in through the door in the ordinary way because of the crowd, they went up to the housetop and let the sick man down through the tiles with his couch into the midst before Jesus. I can imagine the astonishment of the crowd at this

determined but very unceremonious entrance. Then there was Jesus' first word to the stricken man : " Man, thy sins are forgiven thee." What a totally unexpected thing it was for Jesus to say to a man who had come to seek physical healing ! And then there was the colloquy which followed with the scribes and the Pharisees, in which Jesus laid claim to the power to forgive sins, and so set Himself on an equality with God. And finally there was the actual physical wonder when they saw the man, whom it had taken four men to bring into the presence of Jesus, walking home in his own strength with his bed upon his back.

Everything about the miracle was startling ; but if I had to choose which of the elements in it really provoked the comment of my text, I should choose that great word of Jesus about sin. For that word was amazing in itself ; it was amazing in the claim it involved ; but it was most amazing of all in the effect it produced upon the stricken man. It was as if a cloud had been banished from his face. He had come to Jesus, not only palsied in body, but sick in soul. And the sickness of his soul revealed itself in the gloom of his face. But at Christ's word about forgiveness the gloom disappeared, and his face became radiant. There was no mistake about it—Jesus' word had lifted from his soul some

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crushing burden and relieved it of a gnawing pain. His face revealed the change. It was lit up with a new joy. These people had seen the sick in body healed before, but they had never before witnessed the healing of the sick soul. "We have seen," they said, one to another, "strange things to-day."

But it was not simply on this occasion that the people saw strange things in Jesus. He was constantly, by His sayings and His doings, taking people by surprise; doing unexpected and unlikely things. There was nothing conventional about Jesus. He never did what the people thought He would do or ought to do. He was no slave of routine. He was no creature of custom. He was absolutely original and unique. There are some people whose action in a given set of circumstances you can quite accurately forecast, for they are dead sure to do what they consider the correct thing—what they reckon to be good form. But no one could ever forecast what Jesus would do. He went His own way. Fashion and custom had no power over Him. The result was, there was something paradoxical, from the world's point of view, about the life of Jesus, from the start to the finish. It was altogether contrary to public opinion and expectation. It is of this quality of *unexpectedness*, which is such a

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characteristic of the life of Jesus, that I want to speak for a few minutes. I want to illustrate it in one or two directions.

THE UNEXPECTEDNESS OF HIS BIRTH

For my first illustration I will take the unexpectedness of His birth. If ever there was an event which in its conditions and circumstances was paradoxical, in the sense of being counter to all opinion and expectation, it was the birth of Jesus. From one point of view that birth had been long expected. Psalmists and seers had foretold it. The whole nation was on the tiptoe of expectation, watching for it as those who watch for the morning. The birthday of the Messiah was the day which was to bring the Jewish people emancipation and release. In that day their destiny would be fulfilled, and their joy would be complete. For centuries they had waited for this day ; for centuries they had talked together of its coming. But when the day actually came, it came in such unexpected fashion that these people who had watched for it and longed for it did not recognise it. They knew not the day of their visitation. For the popular expectation was that the Messiah's coming would be accompanied by pomp and splendour. They expected

Him to be born in a palace. They imagined that His birth would be attended by all the ceremoniousness and rejoicing which mark the entry of a king's son into the world. And instead of that He was born of a humble mother named Mary, and, so far from His birth taking place in a palace, He was born in a stable; and, so far from any rejoicings marking His advent, nobody was aware that anything special was happening save a few poor shepherds who overheard certain snatches of angelic song as they watched their flocks by night on the hills of Bethlehem. It was certainly a strange way for the Messiah to be born, a strange and unexpected way for the Son of God to enter the world! Looking back from this point of time, we can see a Divine and beautiful reasonableness in that lowly birth. If Jesus was to be the friend and brother of common men, if He was to be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, it was infinitely better that He should be born in a stable than in a palace.) For princes are a select and tiny company, and by their very princedom are separated by a great gulf from ordinary, everyday men. I remember an article written by Dr. Jowett upon the coronation of King George, and what struck him most, he said, was the loneliness of the King himself. His very rank isolated him. And it would have been like that with Jesus had He

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issued from a palace. He might have known something, perhaps, about the burdens and cares of princes, but He would have known nothing about the anxieties and sorrows of the poor. He would have known nothing about the weariness of labour and the precariousness of livelihood and the pinch of poverty. And so He would have been shut out from sympathy with the great masses of mankind. For the vast majority of men are poor. Life for them is hard and precarious. In this England of ours, it is only the thousands who make wills ; the millions make no will at all, for they have nothing to leave. If Jesus was to sympathise with the toiling masses of mankind, it was Divinely fitting that He should be born in a stable and (come into the world as the little child of humble parents. But to people brought up in the belief that the Messiah was to be a great Prince, it was a paradoxical kind of entry. They couldn't believe that it was the Messiah who was thus born ! They cast up His humble birth in His teeth. The circumstances of that birth were so contrary to all expectation and belief that they (simply refused to believe that it was the Messiah's birth at all. " He was in the world and the world knew Him not. He came unto His own and they that were His own received Him not."

THE UNEXPECTEDNESS OF JESUS

THE UNEXPECTEDNESS OF JESUS' SPEECH

I might go on to point out the unexpectedness of the kind of life Jesus lived for the first thirty years. Who would have dreamed of looking for the promised Messiah in a village carpenter? Who would have imagined that the Man who so meekly took the orders of the Nazarene villagers, who built their houses and made their ploughs and mended their chairs, was the holy Son of God? The Nazarenes themselves seem never to have had a glimmer of the nature of the Man who sojourned in their midst. "Is not this the carpenter," they said, "the Son of Mary, and brother of James and Joses, and Juda and Simon, and are not his Sisters here with us?" And they were offended in Him. It was a reflection on their intelligence to suggest that the Messiah had been in their midst for thirty years and they had failed to recognise Him. Their village carpenter the Messiah! The very idea was preposterous and absurd! And perhaps we mustn't be too hard on these Nazarenes. For if only we could put ourselves back in their places, we, too, might feel it to be almost incredible that the Divine Son should stoop to that humble lot. But I pass that by in order to mention two or three things in our Lord's public ministry which clashed with

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popular opinion and belief, and filled those who heard them with astonishment beyond measure.

111 Take His *words* to begin with : They startled, shocked, and amazed the people. “Never man spake like this man,” said the officers who were sent to seize Him, in excuse of their failure. I think they meant that, for sheer charm and grace, there never was speech like the speech of Jesus. That was one of the effects produced on the multitudes who listened to Him. They wondered at the words of grace which proceeded out of His mouth. But it wasn’t only the *grace* of Christ’s speech that astonished the crowds ; they were still more amazed, and sometimes angered, by the originality and freshness of it. Christ was not afraid of challenging fashionable and current beliefs. He repudiated popular ideals. He denied the validity and truth of orthodox beliefs. Let me give you a couple of illustrations : I will turn to the Beatitudes for my first—“Blessed are the meek,” said Jesus, “for they shall inherit the earth.” I am certain that, when the crowds heard Jesus say that, they were amazed, for it ran counter to every received belief. I am certain they regarded it as a paradoxical, an incredible saying. For *meekness* in that ancient world was not reckoned as a virtue : it was a vice. Meekness was

looked upon as synonymous with weakness. The quality admired in the ancient world was *μεγαλοψυχια*, a sort of high self-esteem, the self-esteem that insisted on one's own place and worth. And especially did the promise attached to the Beatitude seem to them paradoxical and absurd. The only man who really got on, as it seemed to them, was the aggressive, self-assertive person. The people who seemed to have inherited the earth at the time were the Romans, and the Romans certainly had not won it by meekness; they had won it by sheer brute force—by a succession of wars of aggression and conquest. The meek man inherit the earth! The meek man was a man on whom everybody else trampled. The only way to get on was not to submit to insult and injury, but to resent them; to let people know that you were not a person to be trifled with. No, the world had never heard a more paradoxical saying than that. It didn't believe it then! And it doesn't believe it now. If you were to go to our Admiralty or War Office and preach this doctrine, they would call you a fool. The safety of our Empire depends, according to them, on ships and soldiers, guns and aeroplanes. And the War Offices and Admiralties of all other nations say exactly the same things, with the result that the world is like a volcano,

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ready to blow our civilisation to smithereens. Perhaps, after all, if our statesmen and politicians only could bring themselves to believe it, this strange and incredible paradox is the profoundest truth. Our own experience in South Africa ought to teach us something. We didn't win and keep South Africa by our military victories. We won it because, when we had beaten the Boers, we gave them all the liberty they asked and left them masters in their own land. Yes, it is a paradox and hard to believe. But in it lies the whole secret of a peaceful world. There will be soon no world to keep if we go on as we are going. But nations may live in peace and amity with one another if they practise the grace of meekness.

Or take this for another illustration of our Lord's strange sayings: When the rich young ruler—that young man of such charm that “Jesus,” we are told, “loved him”—refused Christ's call and went away sorrowful because he had great possessions, Jesus looked round about and then said to His disciples: “How hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God.” How hardly! With what difficulty! (And His disciples were amazed at His words. Whereupon Jesus underlined his previous statement by adding this: “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich

man to enter into the Kingdom of God." And they were astonished exceedingly—they were clean knocked out of themselves—saying, "Who then, can be saved?" This was teaching which ran counter to all the opinions in which they had been bred. For in the Old Testament riches were regarded as proof of the Divine favour. As Bacon puts it, "prosperity is the blessing of the Old Testament." To succeed in a purely material sense was almost the sign and proof that a man was in the kingdom. But Jesus challenged the whole of that conception. He declared that riches, far from being a proof of the Divine favour, were the biggest obstacle in the way of *receiving* the Divine favour. "How hardly shall they that have riches . . ." I am not surprised the disciples were astonished exceedingly. With their traditional beliefs it was a paradoxical and incredible saying. And still men regard it as paradoxical, quixotic, fantastic, absurd. We read it but we pay no heed to it. In spite of Christ's warning, no one is afraid of money. We are all of us spending ourselves in the pursuit of it. When we read these words we lift the eye and we shrug the shoulder—but we do not believe. Oh! it is a strange saying that Jesus should tell us that the most desirable thing on earth is the biggest obstacle in the way of Heaven. With one consent, the world has just refused to believe it.

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And yet it may be just because we have refused to believe this paradoxical saying that our land is so full of wretchedness and unrest. It is because men have sacrificed the Kingdom of God to money that we have strikes and lock-outs, and suspicion and hate. These two paradoxical sayings, which the world has persisted in treating as fantastic and incredible—the saying about meekness, the warning against love of money—if only the world believed them and acted upon them, would banish the two most gigantic evils from which it suffers—industrial strife and international wars.

Christ was unexpected in His words. He was unexpected also in His *deeds*. Let me mention two things by way of illustration.

THE UNEXPECTEDNESS OF HIS CHOICE OF FRIENDS

And this first: the unexpectedness of His choice of *disciples and friends*. No one would have imagined Jesus would have chosen the disciples He did. When men are starting a new enterprise, they try to get ~~distinguished~~ and influential men to give it their backing. When a new company is being launched they try to get the names of widely-known and honoured men upon the directorate. Even in our local affairs—

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the running of a concert or exhibition—we like to get a number of local celebrities to act as patrons. Jesus was starting a society whose object it was to win the wide world to faith and obedience. In that case, you would have expected Him to have chosen as His helpers men who were influential in the religious circles of His day. But He didn't do what men expected of Him. He did the most quixotic and paradoxical thing. "He called twelve, that they might be with Him." And of those twelve the majority were fishermen from the Galilean lake, one was an ex-tax-gatherer, and one a Sinn Feiner. There was only one—Judas, the man of Kerioth—who may have been of some better social standing; and he turned traitor. The rest were the humblest of the humble—unlettered, uninfluential, unknown. Not many wise, not many mighty, were called by Jesus. But He called the foolish things of the world, and the weak things of the world, and the base things of the world, and the things that are not. It was an almost unbelievable choice. They cast His disciples up against Him. "Hath any of the rulers believed on Him, or of the Pharisees?" they asked in scornful contempt. If Jesus had done what most people would have called the wise and prudent thing, He would have secured the support of some influential Rabbis or

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well-known Pharisees, and He would have put their names in the forefront of His prospectus. Instead of that, He entrusted His cause to eleven poor and unlettered men. It was a fantastic choice! And yet, after all, absurd though it seemed, Jesus knew what He was about. The success of Christianity could not be put down to the genius of its advocates! The treasure was in earthen vessels; that made it all the more evident that the excellency of the power was of God.

And the same unexpectedness which revealed itself in the choice of disciples revealed itself also in His choice of friends. He was the friend of publicans and sinners. He cultivated the acquaintance of derelict and outcast folk. He did more than receive them kindly when they came, He went deliberately in search of them. It was a strange way of commending his cause. For these derelicts and castaways were the "untouchables" of Palestine. Good people, respectable people, held rigidly aloof from them. Jesus, when He befriended them, ran the risk of being numbered with them Himself. "A man is known by the company he keeps," we say. And there were plenty to insinuate that, amongst these outcasts and notorious sinners, Jesus found Himself in congenial company. They said, indeed, that He was a drunkard and

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a glutton. If Jesus had confined Himself to the respectable people there might have been a different story to tell, but He called Matthew to be a disciple. He had words of hope for the harlot. He went to lodge with Zacchæus. And by so doing He brought upon His head the wrath and scorn of the orthodox people of Palestine. It was a paradoxical sort of choice—the kind of choice which no man would have expected Him to make—because it violated every rule of prudence. But it was the unexpectedness which has brought hope to the world. Had Jesus done what was expected of Him, Christianity would have been as powerless to touch the down-and-outs of our modern civilisation as Hinduism is to lift the “untouchables” of India. The moral derelicts of the world would have felt Christianity had no message for them. But no one is outside the range of the love of Him who, when here on earth, became the friend of publicans and sinners.

THE UNEXPECTEDNESS OF HIS DEATH

And, finally, and in just a word, notice the unexpectedness of Jesus in His method of achieving human redemption. For the method He chose was that of the Cross. He chose to redeem the world by dying for it. This was not

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the method the Jews had anticipated. This was not the method even His own disciples anticipated. They expected Christ to take possession of the world by right of conquest. They were always dreaming about thrones, quarrelling as to which of them should occupy the throne nearest Christ's when His Kingdom was actually established. The temptation to take possession of the world in that way presented itself to Jesus. It constituted part of the Temptation in the wilderness. The Devil promised Him all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them if He would stoop to the use of worldly weapons. But Jesus thrust the temptation away and deliberately set His face toward the Cross. He set His faith, not on force, but on sacrificial love. He chose to win the world by dying for it. But that was so unexpected a method, that for the moment it shattered the faith of the disciples. The unbelieving Jews thought that by the Cross they had brought an impostor's career to an end ; the disciples thought the Cross meant final defeat and failure. Their hopes of the Kingdom died with the death of Jesus. Even though Jesus Himself had spoken of it to them again and again, they had refused to believe it, and when it really took place all their dreams collapsed. Well, it did seem a strange way of winning the

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world—to accept defeat at its hands, to go down to death and shame, to suffer on a Cross ! When the Apostles went about preaching Christ crucified, people laughed at their message. Paul talks about the “ offence of the Cross.” It seemed absurd to suggest that a person who died on the gibbet was the world’s Saviour. The Cross was a stumbling-block to the Jews and foolishness to the Greeks. But this foolish, paradoxical method of saving and redeeming the world proved itself, in experience, to be the very power and wisdom of God.

There was power to convert and redeem men in that atoning death. I don’t know what would have happened if Jesus had chosen the method expected of Him. Thousands of swords would have leaped out of their scabbards, no doubt, and the Romans would have had a troublous time. But of one thing I am certain, we should not have been thinking about Him and thanking God for Him to-day. But He took the sorrowful way of the Cross, He laid down His life in sheer love, and as a result millions adore and trust Him. It seemed a quixotic, absurd thing to do ; but the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For it is by the Cross Christ has won, and is winning, His Kingdom. I don’t know that the “ offence of

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the Cross " has yet ceased. Life and salvation through a crucified Jesus seem sheer folly to many people still. But there is something in that Cross that meets the deep needs of the human heart. It subdues and melts and changes the soul. I happened not long since, when speaking at a meeting, to quote those familiar lines, " Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to Thy Cross I cling." After the meeting was over an elderly man, humble and unlettered, came to me and said, " I have been down to the gates of death. But them two lines, ' Simply to Thy Cross I cling '—that's it." He may not have had any theory of atonement, but Christ crucified claimed his soul.

The unexpectedness of Jesus! " He never said what people expected He was going to say, nor did what people thought He ought to do." But it was a Divine unexpectedness, and in it the Divine wisdom and passion stand revealed.

*10) The one who is surprised by the
cross when not expected.
in the offer of a new world
the unexpectedness of the
cross is the only way to the
new world not by looking for it*

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LUKE XX. 18.—“Every one that falleth on that stone shall be broken to pieces, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust.”

I HAD given to me the other day a volume written by an American clergyman—at least, I take him to be a clergyman—which had the great advantage of a commendatory preface from the pen of Dean Inge. The book itself is called *The Inescapable Christ*, and it aims to bring the present unsettled age face to face with the realities of the Christian faith. Now I should always take the commendation of Dean Inge as sufficient evidence that a book is worth while. And I found this book worth while. It is challenging, provocative, suggestive. In it I found a chapter with this title: “The Formidableness of Jesus.” Ever since I saw the title and read the chapter which it introduces, this thought of the formidableness of Jesus has been with me, and in this sermon I want to talk about it with you. “The formidableness of Jesus.” Not long ago I had occasion to talk with you about the gladness of Jesus, and I said then that we have been so habituated to think of Jesus as the Man of Sorrows that we

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find it difficult to think of Him as the "glad" Jesus. But, if it is difficult to associate the idea of gladness with our conception of Jesus, it is tenfold more difficult to associate with our conception of Jesus the idea of *formidableness*. For when I turn to my dictionary to discover exactly what the word "formidable" means, I find it defined like this: "exciting fear or apprehension, impressing dread"; and the synonyms for "formidable" which my dictionary gives are words like these: "dreadful, fearful, terrible, frightful, horrible." Words like those seem absurdly out of place when applied to Jesus. We had a battleship called the *Formidable*. Well, the word fits a battleship—for a battleship is a fearful, terrible, frightening thing. But it seems a ridiculous word to apply to Jesus. We think of Him as the "gentle Jesus"—"Gentle Jesus, meek and mild," as our child's hymn puts it. He spoke of Himself as being "meek and lowly in heart." He dealt tenderly with the sinful and the erring. He never broke a bruised reed or quenched a flickering wick. As we picture to ourselves this gracious, loving Person who went about doing good, "formidable" is about the last word in the world we should think of applying to Him. But is there any essential and irreconcilable antagonism between *gentleness* and *formidableness*? Is it

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quite impossible for these two qualities to exist in one and the same Person? If a person's gentleness never became formidableness, would that person be anything like a complete person? Would not gentleness that never became formidable in face of evil and wrong—would it not cease to be a virtue and become a rather contemptible vice? A man who does not become formidable, terrible even, to the wrong-doer can lay no claim to being a perfect man. Now our Lord was meek; but His meekness was not softness. And He was gentle; but His gentleness was not a foolish and easy good-nature. Jesus was formidable as well as gentle, terrible as well as meek. The Bible is never afraid of combining seeming opposites in its descriptions of Jesus. For example, it speaks of "the wrath of the Lamb." "Wrath" and "Lamb" don't somehow seem to fit each other. The Lamb is the symbol of patience, meekness, gentleness, and so has come to stand for Him who went as a Lamb to the slaughter, and, "as a sheep before its shearers is dumb, so He opened not His mouth." Wrath would seem to fit lion rather than Lamb. But the Bible talks of the "wrath of the Lamb"—the wrath of Him who bore with un murmuring patience the rude insults and murderous cruelty of evil men. It declares that that gentle and infinitely patient

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Jesus can blaze out into holy anger, and the wrath is the more terrible just because it is the wrath of the *Lamb*.

There is a wonderful *inclusiveness* about Jesus. There was nothing partial or lop-sided about Him. We say of certain people "they have the defects of their virtues." By which we mean that, if a man, *e.g.*, is strong, he is usually lacking in gentleness, and if, on the other hand, he is gentle, he is usually lacking in strength. But there were no defects to detract from our Lord's virtues. Every virtue had its complement. He was gentle and He was strong. He was meek and He was formidable. He would not have been Perfect Man had He been the one without the other. He kindled hope in many a despairing heart, but He would not have been Perfect Man if He hadn't inspired fear in the hearts of others. And once your attention has been called to it, you find the Gospels contain quite a number of illustrations of this *formidableness of Jesus*. Take this one from the very beginning of His ministry. He went one day to Nazareth, where He had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day He went into the synagogue and preached. But His sermon so enraged the congregation that the service ended in a riot, and they drove Jesus out of the city and took Him to the brow

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of the hill, meaning to cast Him down headlong. But when they reached the brow where their murderous intent was to be translated into deed, Jesus turned round and faced them. And there was something about Him that smote those furious, raging folk to the heart with a sudden awe, so that none of them dared stretch out a hand to do Him hurt—but He, passing through the midst of them, went His way.

Or take that story of the cleansing of the Temple—whether it occurred at the beginning or at the close of His ministry—or whether it occurred at both. In the court of the Gentiles there were men who sold oxen and sheep and doves, and there were others who exchanged the money of the pilgrims for the special money in which alone the Temple dues could be paid. It was a profitable business, and it was carried on with the full consent of the Temple authorities, who, indeed, derived a handsome income from it. And one day Jesus appears in their midst—vested with no sort of authority, just a young provincial, undistinguished and unknown, and, making for Himself a scourge of cords, He began to drive them all out of the Temple court, men and beasts together, and overturned the money-changers' tables so that the coins were scattered about the floor—and, though He was only one and they were a multitude, there was something

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about Him so awe-inspiring, so formidable, that they fled helter-skelter, the exchangers not even waiting to pick up their precious coins, out of the Temple courts, and out of the sight of that Face and Form that seemed to shrivel them like a flame.

Or take, again, that story of the woman taken in adultery whom a mob of coarse-minded scribes and Pharisees dragged into His presence. Jesus at first hung His head for very shame—shame for the woman and the coarse cruelty of the men. But, when they continued to clamour for His judgment, He lifted Himself up and, looking these brazen men in the face, He said, “He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.” And there was something about the appearance of Jesus just then, some piercing light in His eye, that filled those coarse and brutal men with a kind of terror. They wanted to get out of His sight, and so, one by one, beginning with the eldest even unto the last, they slunk silently away—so that Jesus and the sobbing woman were left alone.

And for final illustration of the fact that there was a certain formidableness about Jesus take the story of what happened in the Garden when the soldiers and Temple servants came out with swords and staves to seize Him. Jesus did not

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wait to be taken. He went forth to meet them at the Garden Gate, and said to them, "Whom seek ye?" And when they replied, "Jesus of Nazareth," He answered, "I am He." And then, instead of laying hands on Him, what happened was this: "When therefore He said unto them, I am He, they went backward and fell to the ground." There was something about Jesus, something so awe-inspiring, something that so struck fear into their hearts, that that mob of men fell back from before Him. Well, perhaps I have said enough to establish my point. We misread Jesus, we have failed to note all the features of the Gospel portrait of Him, if we think of Him simply as the "gentle Jesus"; there was also something formidable, and even terrifying, about Him which struck fear into the hearts of evil men and made them eager to escape from His Presence.

I

This "formidableness" of which I have been speaking up to this point was no doubt the formidableness of an absolutely pure and holy Person face to face with evil and sinful men. For goodness is always terrifying to evil men. They fear it and shun it, as unclean birds fear

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and shun the light of the sun. Goodness condemns evil men by revealing themselves to themselves. That was the reason Mr. Live Loose gave for wishing to have Faithful put to death—"He would always be condemning my way." Jesus was formidable to the evil men of His day for the very same reason. His very presence in their midst revealed them and condemned them, and for that cause they hated Him and feared Him. But there was a deeper and more solemn formidableness about Jesus even than that. It is the formidableness suggested by the words of my text. Jesus quoted these words immediately after speaking the parable of the wicked husbandmen. That was a parable about the Jews, their prophets, and Himself. The Master of the Vineyard had let it out to husbandmen, and at the fitting time he sent his servants to receive his agreed portion of the fruit. But instead of paying the Master of the Vineyard his due they mishandled his servants, beating some, stoning some, and killing some. Failing with his servants, the Master of the Vineyard resolved to send his Son, for, said he, "They will reverence my son." But when the husbandmen saw him they said, "This is the heir; come, let us kill him that the inheritance may be ours." So they cast him forth out of the vineyard and killed him. But nevertheless

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the vineyard did not become theirs. They themselves were at the last cast out and miserably destroyed. And then Jesus added this stern and solemn word. "What, then, is this that is written. The stone which the builder rejected, the same is made the head of the corner?" And to that quotation He added this searching and almost frightening word of His own: "Every one that falleth on that stone shall be broken in pieces, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it shall scatter him like dust."

The men who listened to that parable were under no mistake as to what Jesus meant. They knew that He spoke the parable of them and of their nation. They knew that they were the wicked husbandmen who had killed the servants and were about to consummate their wickedness by killing the Son. And Jesus too knew quite well what was in store for Him. He knew death was to be His portion. He knew that in a few days His cause would seem as if it went down in utter defeat and shame. And yet, with the Cross confronting Him, He tells these men who were intent upon His murder that they cannot stop Him from coming to the place God destined for Him. They might kill Him on a cross, but He would convert the cross into a throne. They could not get rid of Jesus by putting

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Him to death. The stone which the builders refused would yet be made the head of the corner. And then He goes on to add—and this is the more formidable and menacing part of the saying—that everything and everybody opposed to Him would come to disaster: “Every one that falleth on this stone shall be broken, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it shall scatter him as dust.”

Now, had there been time, I should like to have paused to say just a word about the self-consciousness of Jesus as implied in a saying like this. People are fond of saying that Jesus makes no clear, and unmistakable claim to divinity. I don't know that I would subscribe to that assertion—but even if it were true, it does not prove that Jesus did not know Himself divine. Jesus was not in the habit of asserting His divinity, but He assumed it all the time. It is the ground and basis of His great claims. It lies aback of such a saying as this of my text. Here He is saying that the destiny of men and nations depends on their attitude to Himself. Men can do two things with Jesus. They can either build on Him as a foundation, in which case life becomes strong and fair and secure, or they can collide with Him, in which case life gets smashed into ruin. Now, Jesus could not have said a tremendous

thing like that unless He believed that in Him the mind and will and purpose of God were perfectly expressed, and that in opposing Him men were really opposing God. That is to say, back of such a tremendous saying as this lies the conviction that the Father and He were one thing. But, passing that by with the bare mention, let me get back again to the truth embodied in this tremendous word. It is really this—men may rebel against God's purposes, but they cannot thwart or defeat them. Men may reject Jesus, but that is not going to be the end. The most hopeless fight in the world, as Gamaliel well knew, is the fight against God. "If any one will not make God's purpose the foundation-stone for all their living, then the stone becomes an avalanche, grinding them to powder beneath its awful weight."

II

It is in this fact the real formidableness of Jesus consists. He is set for the rise and fall of men. He is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence to all those who reject Him, and those who come into collision with Him break themselves in pieces. Now, what is this? Is it just a theological figment with no substance

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in it? Is it a mere bogey designed to terrify men into some sort of submission to Jesus? Or is it deep and eternal truth? Now, I would argue on broad and general grounds that, if our world is a moral world at all, this is bound to be eternal truth. If Jesus is the expression of the mind and will of God, then all who come into collision with Jesus are bound to be broken because they are in collision with Almighty God. In a moral world, it simply isn't safe to fly in the face of truth and justice and holiness. God cannot, in the long run, be either thwarted or defied. The end of the man who tries to do it can be nothing but calamity and disaster. But I am not left to argue the matter on general principles. The history of the world confirms the warning of my text: "He that falleth on this stone shall be broken." It was of and to the Jewish nation as *a nation* that the parable was originally spoken and the warning addressed. Well, look at the story of the Jewish nation. When Jesus came in sight of Jerusalem on that last journey of His, He wept over it, He sobbed aloud for it. For He knew what Jerusalem would do! He knew it would reject Him and, rejecting Him, would come into collision with the will of God. And, looking down the vista of the years, He saw doom coming—sure, certain, terrible! "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem,"

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He cried, "if thou hadst known the things that pertain unto thy peace, but now they are hid from thine eyes." Well, Jerusalem did reject Him. In the finality of their rejection the Jews crucified Him, and as they passed beneath the Cross they jeered at Him and mocked Him in their insolent triumph. They thought they had done with Jesus. But in forty years' time Jerusalem, amid horrors that defy description, went crashing into ruin. "It had refused the inspiration which might have made it fit to live, and in the vast balances of God it had been tried and found wanting." It had fallen upon the stone and it was broken in pieces.

Take, for further illustration, the story of Rome. There is a great deal about Rome in the New Testament. If it is Jerusalem's antagonism to Jesus we read about in the Gospels and the Book of the Acts, Rome is the enemy when we come to the Book of Revelation. Rome took up the work of persecuting the infant Church and trying to stamp out the Christian faith. And Rome seemed mighty, impregnable, eternal. But Rome was also brutal, oppressive, and morally corrupt. And the seer, looking at Rome, and weighing it according to the judgments of Jesus, was sure it could not last. "Fallen, fallen, is Babylon

the great," he cries, as if the doom were already accomplished. An Empire which, because of its tyranny and cruel selfishness and moral corruption, came into conflict with the moral purposes of God could not last. And fall it did, with a crash that shook the world. It fell upon the stone and was broken in pieces, but "past its disappearance the moral purposes incarnated in Jesus moved on to fashion another civilisation in its place."

And what is illustrated in the story of those two nations has been illustrated many a time since. Institutions, nations, empires, that have come into collision with the mind and spirit of Jesus, with those eternal principles which He propounded, have gone tumbling down. I am not sure that we did not see the latest illustration of it in the Great War, when the greatest nation in the world, perhaps, but a nation which put its trust in naked force, went head-long to defeat. For the truth embodied in the text embodies a principle that is operative still. Things that come into collision with the mind and spirit of Christ are doomed because they are in conflict with those eternal forces and laws which express the working of God's purpose. Jesus is formidable still to every system, every institution, that is not based on justice and truth.

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Think of our *social and industrial* system, for example. Certain papers of the baser sort are continually trying to make the skins of their readers creep with terrifying stories of the activity of what they call "the Reds." There are timid folks who are haunted by dread of the Bolsheviks. But if the basis of our civilisation is sound, if it really embodies the spirit of Jesus, we need not trouble ourselves about Reds and Bolsheviks. No power on earth can possibly overthrow it. But, if our civilisation is based upon principles which are contrary to the spirit of Jesus, no action we may take against Reds and Bolsheviks can possibly preserve it for the simple reason that—if I may be forgiven for the phrase—we are "up against" God. That is the question we ought to face—in our modern civilisation are we building on Christ or are we in collision with Him? Is our present system, whereby some are inordinately rich and some desperately poor, wherein some waste and some want, wherein some have more houses than they can inhabit and others have no house at all, wherein self-interest is the regular and recognised motive of action—is this kind of civilisation in accord with the spirit of Christ? If it isn't, our business is to try to make it such. For nothing we can do can prop up a civilisation that comes

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into collision with Christ. "Whosoever falls on this stone shall be broken." It will crash, not because of the activities of revolutionaries, but because it flouts and defies the will of God.

Or think of our *International Relationships*. People seem to think that our international relationships are to be governed simply by regard for our own interests, our own rights, our own prestige. Consequently we keep up armies and navies to defend our rights, to promote our interests, and to maintain our prestige. And, when our interest and that of some other nation clash, then comes war—war with its infinite waste of blood and treasure, war with its bitter harvest of blighted lives and broken hearts. Now our whole conception of our relation to other nations is anti-Christian. In Christ's view we are all members of one another. God made of one all the nations upon earth. And because it is anti-Christian it is doomed. War has immense vested interests behind it, but, in spite of vested interests and the diplomacy that seems always to take war for granted, war is to pass, and the whole system out of which it is born is to vanish away. It will break against the mind and will of Christ, which steadily and irresistibly is taking captive the minds of men. "Whomsoever shall fall upon this stone shall be broken." Jesus is

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formidable to every evil thing, to every evil system, to every institution that has not justice and truth at the heart of it. If I may quote a sentence from the book I mentioned at the beginning: "Indestructible in its energy, the power of Christ pours itself into new channels and shatters and overflows them if these through sin or through stupidity become blockaded. It runs like a mighty river, fertilising great provinces of life, but gathering itself into floods and mighty torrents which can carve its canyons through every wall of man's resistance. To our own inexorable cost we may deny it, but we cannot defy it, when the last balances of reality are struck"—Every one that falleth on that stone shall be broken to pieces, but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will scatter him as dust.

III

I finish by saying that what is true of institutions and nations is also true of *individuals*. The rejected stone becomes a stone against which we break ourselves in pieces. This is an aspect of truth upon which we do not dwell much in these days—but, though we neglect it, we cannot get rid of it. It is not a matter of no concern what a man does with Jesus—

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it is a matter of infinite moment. We speak—and we act—as if it didn't matter very much whether a man accepted Christ or not. As a simple fact, it matters everything. If a man rejects Christ, he rejects goodness and purity and love, he chooses the base and the evil, and when he chooses the base and the evil, and rejects goodness and purity and love, he is setting himself against the eternal laws of the universe, he is setting himself against God. There can be only one result of such a choice—a broken and shattered life. We can see that illustrated in part before our eyes—we see men who have chosen the base things of life and rejected Christ and the things for which He stands, and the result is disaster and ruin. But it is only in part we see the ruin here. There is a judgment in which goodness is to be vindicated and evil condemned. There must be a judgment if this world is to be counted a moral world at all, for justice is not done down here. Let us not cumber this matter up with questions of the length of the punishment—that secret belongs to God. But judgment and penalty there must be. It is then the completeness of the disaster will be obvious—when men find themselves in the outer darkness. “Every one that falleth on this stone shall be broken.”

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What are you going to do with Jesus? It is *the* critical question. We break or make ourselves upon Him. Rejecting Him, we simply break ourselves. But coming to Him, the living Stone, we get built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, a people for God's own possession.

CHRIST'S QUESTION TO THE YOUNG RULER

MARK X. 18.—“And Jesus said unto him, Why callest thou Me good? None is good save one, even God.”

IN the most recent book on preaching which I have had the privilege of reading, the writer—an American Presbyterian minister—suggests that a preacher might discover a very heart-searching series of sermons in the questions put by Jesus Himself to men. Men often asked Him questions. Some of those questions were wise and some of them were foolish, but to them all Jesus gave great and sublime answers. But sometimes Jesus asked questions on His own account, and His questions search the great deeps of the soul. It is with a question which Jesus put to a certain young man in the Gospel story that I want to concern myself in this sermon. The young man to whom the question was put is the young man familiarly known as the rich young ruler. There was much that was winsome and attractive about this young man. There was, first of all, his unblemished life. When he said of the commandments that he had kept them from his youth, it was no empty boast. He had really lived a

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blameless life. Like St. Paul, as touching the righteousness which was of the Law, he was found blameless. But he was obviously dissatisfied with a merely legal morality. He felt something was lacking. He did not feel he was really in possession of the eternal life; and he was eager to get it. That was why he came to Jesus. He felt Jesus could tell him the way to that fuller communion with God that he desired. "Good master," he said, "what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" That was a second quality that commended him to Jesus. And then, over and above this religious earnestness of his, there was a certain charm about the man himself. He was a choice young man. He was eager and enthusiastic. He had the clear eye and the open countenance of one whose life had not been defiled by folly and sin. Altogether, I am disposed to think that in the whole course of His public career Jesus never met a man who so commended himself to Him as did this young ruler. At any rate, I think he is the only person of whom we are told that Jesus "loved" him; "Jesus looking upon him loved him."

And yet, with all his attractive qualities, there was something lacking in the young ruler. His chief fault, no doubt, was that he was unwilling to set God first. When Jesus tested him as to

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his willingness to give up his wealth for the Kingdom of God's sake, he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions. But I do not think that was his only defect. I think there was a certain superficiality and shallowness about him. There was no great deepness of earth in him. That comes out in his whole notion of religion. "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" "What shall I do?" He had the shallow notion that eternal life was something he could win by certain merits of his own. He seemed to think that, if Jesus only told him what there was to be done, he could do it. It is with that superficiality, that shallowness, that Jesus deals in His very first sentence. For, instead of promptly answering the young ruler's question, Jesus challenged him with one of His own. "Good Master," the young man had said. "Why callest thou Me good?" replied Jesus. "There is none good save one, that is God." It sounds almost harsh and stern. How are we to account for it? On this principle—Jesus dealt with men *as individuals*. He had a way of encouraging the weak and timid and of checking the impulsive and the forward. When a certain man came to him and said, "I will follow Thee whithersoever thou goest," Jesus replied to him almost sharply: "Foxes have holes, and the

birds of the air have nests ; but the Son of Man hath not where to lay His head." And I think there was something superficial and glib and facile about this young ruler which made Jesus meet his question with another : " Why callest thou Me good ? none is good save one, that is God."

I

Now, what was Jesus doing when He challenged the young ruler with that question ? Well, to begin at the beginning and to take the simplest thing first, it was a challenge of the young ruler's use of words. " Good Master," so he had apostrophised Jesus. What was that word " good " as he used it ? Was it just a conventional form of address ? Was it used as a complimentary epithet ? Or did the young ruler really mean it ? For that word " good " was a tremendous word and, properly used, meant tremendous things. It was, indeed, one of the biggest words in human speech. For " good " meant " morally excellent," complete freedom from all that was base and evil and sinful. It was so tremendous a word that it was properly applicable only to Almighty God Himself : " None is good save one, that is God." A man did not deserve to be called

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"good" who was only partially good—who had certain moral excellencies combined with certain moral defects—any more than a thing would deserve to be called white if it was grey or a mixture of black and white. "Good" was an absolute kind of word, an uncompromising word. It stood for complete moral excellence. Goodness, like the Mosaic law, was violated and destroyed if a man came short even in one point. In current usage, even then, the word, no doubt, had been cheapened. Like coins which have been long in circulation it had lost weight. Like the paper money of France and Italy and Germany, it had sunk enormously in value. If I may use the modern technical term—it had got "deflated." "Good" had come to mean decent, respectable. Anybody who possessed a decent reputation was a "good" man. The type of the "good" man in Palestine was the Pharisee, and the Pharisee, according to our Lord's own account, managed to combine his piety and long prayers with flagrant oppression and injustice. Well, this was the word which the young ruler had applied to Jesus. "Good Master!" he had said. Jesus at once challenges the word. In what sense was the young ruler using it?—in its real meaning, or in the loose conventional fashion? Was this a tribute to Christ's

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moral excellence, or was it just the usual kind of compliment—the kind of address he would have employed in the case of any other teacher? “Why callest thou Me good?” Jesus drives the young ruler back upon his own word and asks him what he meant by it.

I wonder if the word “hate” is too strong a word to use of the feelings of Jesus? If it is not, I will venture to say that our Lord hated the use and abuse of words. You find in the Sermon on the Mount a stern denunciation of swearing. It is not to be interpreted as a prohibition of legal oaths. Nor is it simply a warning against profanity. Why do men indulge in oaths? They do it to lend emphasis to their speech—to heighten, so to speak, its colour. But there is peril in this habit of “colouring” speech. It tends to become exaggeration, and exaggeration becomes practically untruth. It is against that tendency that Jesus was uttering His warning. It was not simply profanity, but untruths, that He was denouncing. Jesus would have our speech to be simple and true. He would have words correspond to facts. “Let your speech,” He said, “be Yea, yea; Nay, nay: whatsoever is more than these is of the evil one.” You find Him on another occasion warning men

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against "idle words"—words that did not correspond to actualities—foolish, empty words. "For," said He, "by thy words thou shalt be justified and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." And it is not difficult to discover why our Lord thus hated and condemned all loose, insincere, and exaggerated speech. There was a grave moral peril in it. Insincere speech issued in insincere character. Words are not the light, trivial, unimportant things we often suppose they are. When we use them aright, they ought to be expressions of fact and of moral judgment. But it is vital that we should remember that the words we habitually use affect both our view of facts and also our moral judgments. What I mean is this: you can't apply great and noble words to small and ignoble things without emptying such words of their content and debasing men's whole conception of the things those words are supposed to represent. When a man applies a great and dignified word to a base and mean thing, he is cheapening the moral coinage and confusing the moral judgment. "A rose by any other name," we say in our familiar proverb, "would smell as sweet"; and, of course, that is true. You do not alter the character of the rose by altering its name. It preserves its rose quality whatever name you give it. And, equally,

of course, you do not make a noxious weed a rose by calling it one. But by persisting in calling a noxious thing a rose, pretending to admire it as a rose, you may confuse men's judgments and make them think the noxious thing is not noxious at all. To apply a great name to a mean thing is an offence against truth and a sin against the soul. And who shall say that in this age of ours we are not guilty of it?

Take that very word *good*, for example. We are as loose in the use of it as was this rich young ruler. Oftentimes, as we employ it, it means nothing more than good-natured. At other times we use it as the sort of synonym for respectability; and respectability is not goodness. A man is not a good man simply because he incurs no public reproach. *Respectability* is a poor and paltry thing, *goodness* is a great and noble thing. But when we use the term *good* as if it just meant *respectable*, we are debasing the moral coinage. We are lowering the moral standard and making men feel that all they need to do to be good is to avoid public disgrace.

Take that great word *love* for a second illustration. According to St. Paul, it is the greatest thing in the world. But then, love, as he thinks of it, is a holy, austere, and Divine thing. And

such love is in reality. Love is of God, and he that loveth is born of God and knoweth God. But what is love in the hands of our modern novelists? They have emptied it of all suggestion of the holy, and the pure, and the Divine. They have degraded the word; they have soiled it; they have defiled it. For they have applied this great and holy word to sensual passion, to vagrant desire, to sexual appetite. They have taken this Divine word and made it bestial. They have taken this word which describes the quality which unites us to God and have applied it to instincts and impulses that unite us with the brute. And by so doing they have lowered the whole moral tone and have gone far towards loosening the ties which hold Society together. When our youth—under the teaching of our modern novelists—identify love with lust, we are heading straight for the morals of the sty. In the interests of our moral life we need to be careful in our use of words. We must not make base and ugly things seem fair and beautiful by decking them out in the splendour of a great name. Name and thing must correspond. Ugly things must receive their own ugly names. Great names must be reserved for the really great and noble things. A misuse of terms is an offence against the moral order. As Socrates says in the

Phædo: "To use words wrongly and indefinitely is not merely an error in itself; it also creates evil in the soul."

II

Jesus confronted this young ruler with his own words. "Good Master," He said. "Why callest thou Me good?" replied Jesus, as if to ask, "Do you mean what you say?"—What is this—a true word or just a compliment? It was more than a protest against the loose use of words; it was a demand for *reality*. The merely conventional and formal was hateful to Jesus. He demanded truth in the inward parts. He didn't want this young ruler to use towards Him the language of conventional respect. He wanted language that should be the expression of his real soul. Reality, sincerity, was what our Lord demanded. If there was one thing He loathed more than another it was pretence, formalism; what He called hypocrisy. And nowhere is pretence and unreality more utterly hateful than in religion. Perhaps I am not forcing my text unduly if I see in it a warning against *religious cant*. What exactly do we mean by *cant*? My dictionary defines it as "speaking with affectation about religion." It means using religious terms which

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we do not sincerely mean. And there is a sore temptation to do that, partly because people expect to hear certain terms and partly because men wish to gain a certain reputation for orthodoxy. But it is a fatal thing to do. It is an insult to Him who is the Truth to speak to Him, or about Him, in words which are insincere. You remember that one of the charges brought against the Church in that rather terrible book, *Religion and the War*, was the charge of unreality, and amongst other things of unreality in speech. Of course, if once the suspicion enters the minds of his hearers that the preacher is not truthful and sincere in what he says, that man's influence is absolutely at an end. There are certain great phrases which expressed the deepest faith of our fathers, and which, indeed, express the deepest faith of some of us still—words like *atonement* and *propitiation*, a phrase like *justification by faith*. I think I can use them quite honestly, because they stand to me for supreme realities. But if they mean nothing to a man, if he cannot give them their proper content, he had better not use them at all. Let him express in his own words what is real to him in the sacrifice of Christ and what it is he himself depends on for acceptance with God. I believe, for myself, that the Divinity of Christ is

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essential to the Gospel ; but it is infinitely better that a man should speak of Christ sincerely, even if he can get no further than to confess that He was the best and greatest of men, than that he should speak of Him as " light of light," " Very God of very God," and not really mean what he says. Jesus answered the prayer of the man who could only stammer out, " Lord, I believe ; help Thou mine unbelief." But there were some who called Him " Lord, Lord " of whom He said : " I never knew you. Depart from Me, ye that work iniquity." " Why callest thou Me good ? " It is a demand for sincere religious speech. It brought back to me these words of Horatius Bonar :

Help me, my God, to speak
True words to Thee each day ;
Real let my voice be when I praise,
And trustful when I pray.
Thy words are true to me ;
Let mine to Thee be true.
The speech of my whole heart and soul,
However low and few.

III

Now I want to pass on to another point, different from the points I have already referred to, and yet arising out of them. I am not going to withdraw a single word of what I have said

about the right use of words. But Jesus did not ask this question simply because He wanted to know if the rich young ruler was using words in their rightful sense ; He asked it because He wanted to know how the young ruler thought about Himself. He was not only challenging the young ruler's use of a word : He was confronting him with the challenge of His own Person. " Why callest thou *Me* good ? " Why do you apply that epithet to Me ? " There is none good but one, even God." Remembering that, do you still call Me " good " ? Jesus is here driving the young man back upon his foundations, bidding him think out his half-formed beliefs. " Why callest thou *Me* good ? " Now, as you know, this short sentence has been the subject of vast debate. Controversy has raged around it. The Socinian, *i.e.*, the man who takes the humanitarian view of our Lord's person, interprets the sentence to mean that Jesus here is disclaiming the very idea of being put on an equality with God. *Prima facie*, that interpretation seems to have most to say for itself. It is the " first thought " interpretation of the words. But second thoughts will give us pause, and, indeed, compel us to reject that facile interpretation as quite hopeless. To begin with, I think if Jesus had meant what the Socinian thinks He meant—if in these words

He was really disclaiming the epithet "good" as being one reserved for God alone—He would not have cast them in the form of a question; He would have cast them into the form of positive and emphatic statement. He would not have said, "Why callest thou Me good?" He would have said, "Thou must not call Me good; none is good save one, even God." But there is a much more serious objection to the Socinian interpretation than that suggested by the interrogative form of the sentence. It is this: Interpreted in that fashion, it makes Jesus not only disclaim Divinity—it makes Him disclaim "goodness" as well. Such an interpretation is utterly hopeless, because it flies in the face of the entire witness of the Gospels, and it contradicts all we know of the self-consciousness of Christ.

Take first that matter of the self-consciousness of Christ, for, of course, what we are to think of Him must be decided by what He thought about Himself. Well, what did Jesus think about Himself—so far as the Gospels are able to tell us? The most significant thing about the self-consciousness of Jesus is the absence of all sense of sin. Not from the beginning to the end of His life does any confession of sin fall from His lips. In the prayer which He taught His disciples to pray there is this sentence:

“Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us.” But while He taught His disciples to pray like that there is no evidence at all that He ever prayed it with them. Now, if Jesus had simply been a good man in the sense that Moses and David were good men, the cry for pardon would surely have been heard from Him, for the better the man the keener the sense of shortcoming. But there is in Jesus no sense of sin. Indeed, I can put it more strongly than that, and say that there is in Him the consciousness of being perfectly free from sin. Take these two words of His for evidence of what I say. First of all, recall that tremendous challenge He flung out in the course of a controversy with the Jews: “Which of you convicted Me of sin?” And for second illustration take that other tremendous word which He uttered on the very eve of His Passion: “The prince of this world cometh and hath nothing in Me.” Here is a difference between Jesus and all other men. Other men know they have sinned and come short; Jesus was absolutely and utterly free from any sense of sin at all. And our Lord’s self-consciousness is confirmed by the witness of those who came in contact with him. Some of them are unwilling witnesses, but their witness is all the more noteworthy on that

account. They would have given anything to find something to blame in Jesus, but they could find nothing. Pilate would have given his soul almost to have discovered some fault in Jesus which would have provided some pretext for signing His death warrant. But search as he might he could find nothing. Again and again he had to bear witness, "I find no fault in Him," and was reduced at last to the miserable expedient of washing his hands in the sight of the people to signify that he repudiated all responsibility for the crime. Even the high priests, for all their malignant hate, could ferret out nothing. They condemned Him at the last because He said plainly that He was the Son of God. And the unwilling testimony of His foes is confirmed by the glad witness of His friends. That is what Peter says about Him: "He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth." And another Christian writer says that He was "holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners."

In view of all this, it is foolish to say that Jesus is here disclaiming goodness and putting Himself on the level of other and fallible men. And, let me add, the idea of sinlessness does not exhaust the goodness that was in Christ. Sinlessness is a negative term. But goodness is active and positive. When we say that God

is good we mean more than that no fault mars His perfection ; we mean that He is actively beneficent. The Lord is good to all and His tender mercies are over all His works. He daily loadeth us with benefits. He is continually opening His hand and filling us with good. And the goodness of Jesus was of that positive Divine sort. "He went about doing good" is the account one of His disciples gives of Him. You could trace Jesus' track through the towns and villages of Palestine by the blessings He left behind, by the sick people He healed and the sorrowing people He comforted and the morally fallen whom He uplifted—just as you can trace the course of a river by the deeper verdure of the fields along its banks. Jesus was good with a goodness seen in no one either before or since. His was a flawless goodness. There was in Him no defect or shadow of defect. His was a positive and triumphant goodness. He was good with the kind of goodness we attribute to Almighty God.

This is no repudiation of the epithet. It is a challenge and a claim. "Thou callest Me good" ; Why do you do it ? If you acknowledge Me to be good, are you ready to give Me the right predicate ? "There is none good save one, even God." Are you ready to call Me God's Son and to acknowledge Me to be

Divine? That is really what Jesus was doing by this questioning—challenging the young ruler, confronting him with His Person. Here was a Person perfectly good—with the kind of perfect goodness only found in God—what account was he going to give of Him?

It is with that same challenge He confronts men still. Even the Socinian shrinks from saying that Jesus was fallible and sinful. But, if He was flawless and perfect, who was He? For none is perfectly good in that sense save God. It is from this point of view that we can best approach the Divinity of our Lord. It is of no use starting with the Virgin Birth. To many the account of the Birth is itself a stumbling-block; and it is not much better to start off with the miracles, for the miracles to many present a difficulty. The point from which to start is this of our Lord's perfect goodness. In all the world's history there has been no ordinary man who has achieved perfect goodness. Perfect goodness, immaculate holiness can be predicated only of God. But Jesus was perfectly good—He alone has trodden life's dusty ways without contracting smudge or stain. "There is none good save one, that is God." But here is One who was absolutely and perfectly good—without flaw or lapse or defect, or shadow of defect. What are we to say of

Him? What *can* we say of Him but that He was God manifest in the flesh? "Why callest thou Me good?" It is our Lord's challenge to you and me. What can we do to this Person, good with the goodness of God Himself, save fall at His feet and worship Him, saying, "My Lord and my God"?

CHRIST'S VIEW OF DEATH AND AFTERWARDS

JOHN xiv.—“In My Father's house are many mansions: I go to prepare a place for you, and if I go and prepare a place for you I come again and receive you unto Myself, that where I am there ye may be also.”

IF there is one chapter in the whole of Sacred Writ which is more sacred and holy than the rest, it is this fourteenth chapter of St. John, for it contains our Lord's farewell messages to His disciples. Last words have a proverbial poignancy and pathos, but no last words are so sacred as the last words of Jesus. He spoke these words under the very shadow of His Cross, when death was only a few hours away. Then the chapter is made additionally sacred by its human associations. You remember that Barrie says that his mother's Bible opened of its own accord at the fourteenth chapter of John. And that would be true of many another Bible besides Margaret Ogilvy's. “All down the ages,” says Dr. David Smith, “this chapter has been a stay and strength to troubled souls in every strait of life and in the awful hour of death.” Dear ones of our own have found strength and comfort in these words of exquisite and divine tenderness. They have rallied their

fainting souls at the challenge of this brave word, "Let not your heart be troubled: ye believe in God, believe also in Me."

Just because it is so sacred and dear a chapter, I have hesitated to turn to its verses for texts of sermons. A sermon so rarely seems adequate to a great and familiar verse. But somehow, as Easter drew nigh, these great verses which I have just read out kept recurring to memory. They seemed to me to contain the very heart of the Easter Gospel, so I resolved that I would take the risk of preaching an inadequate sermon and speak with you about the mighty and transfiguring truths which the verses proclaim.

And the first remark I want to make is a general one. This chapter, as I have already said, is part of our Lord's farewell address to His disciples, and just because it is a farewell address there is an element of pathos about it. But we shall entirely miss the spirit of the chapter if we think of it as a sad chapter. It is a brave and cheerful chapter. It is a serene and happy chapter. It is full of a magnificent confidence. The trumpet note of triumph sounds all through it. In this chapter death has already lost its sting. Perhaps the triumph is not so boisterous as that which finds expression in St. Paul's shout: "O grave, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting?" The sense of

triumph is quieter and more serene, but it is just as sure. Jesus was not afraid of death. The Gospels have a good deal to say about the sorrow of our Lord's soul on the eve of the Passion. But we entirely misinterpret that sorrow if we suppose that Jesus was afraid to die. What shook our Lord's soul to its depths was not the thought of the mere act of dying, but the terrible accompaniments of His death—the shame of it, the bitter ignominy of it, and, above all else, the forsakenness of it. It was not the physical act of dying, but the guilt and curse of sin which were to come upon Him that made our Lord shudder at the prospect. But He was not afraid to die. He knew what He was going to. He knew that just beyond the grave was the Father's house. Jesus had no doubt about His own Resurrection. He never for one moment imagined that the Cross was going to be the end of Him. Easter morning was a surprise to the disciples, but it was no surprise to Jesus. He knew it must be. He foretold it. He never once spoke of His dying without also speaking of His rising again. That is the great difference between the farewell words of Socrates and the farewell words of Jesus. Socrates spoke nobly and bravely and hopefully. He speculated about the immortality of his soul. But his best and bravest

word was only a brave guess. Socrates did not know where he was going—he stepped out into the unknown. But Jesus *knew*. He was going, He said, to the Father's house. Jesus had not to go down to death in order to discover what there was on the other side. He knew before He went. He came back, not to tell us something new which He had found out—He came back only to make us sure that what He had previously said was true. So I say again, this chapter is a cheerful chapter. There is an air of assured triumph about it. That is, indeed, why people who have had to face death in their homes, and people who have to face death for themselves, instinctively turn to this chapter. They turn to it for assurances wherewith to conquer and banish their own fears. And they do not turn in vain. The very first verse of the chapter, "Let not your heart be troubled; ye believe in God, believe also in Me," is like a bugle note which speaks of heavenly succour and scatters in headlong rout all our timidities and fears.

It is Jesus who, in this chapter, is facing what we call "the end," but what He knew was not the end. He was facing it with a happy confidence just because He knew it was not the end. He was absolutely sure of Resurrection and

Life. Easter did not happen, let me insist again, for Jesus' sake: it happened for *our* sakes. The only special feature of the Resurrection of Jesus is His re-appearance in time, and those re-appearances were solely in the interests of His disciples. He came back to this world of ours just to convince those disciples that the Father's house of which He had spoken to them was no myth or dream or beautiful fancy, but a great and blessed reality. It was Jesus who was about to die—but His whole thought is of the disciples whom He is leaving behind. The whole of this farewell speech is meant for their comfort. In the opening verses He is talking quite frankly about death and what comes after. You may think *death* is rather a sombre subject to talk about. And so, from one point of view, it is. But it is of no use ignoring it. There it is—a stark, brutal, bullying fact—an experience through which we all have to pass. And so long as we are afraid of it it will poison the springs of life and tinge our very joys with sadness. Many try to force the thought of death into the background; they plunge into work or pleasure in order to forget. But we don't get rid of death by trying to forget it. It lies in wait for us even though we refuse to think of it. There is only one really effective way of getting rid of the fear of

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death, and that is to get Christ's view of it. And we get suggestions of what Christ's view of death and the afterwards is in the verses of my text.

Although, perhaps, that word "view" is quite the wrong word to use, for in our common use of it it carries with it a suggestion of guess and uncertainty. When we say "that is my view" we practically admit there may be other views than ours and that possibly those other views may be right. So that "view" in current usage means little more than opinion. But it is not a "view" in that sense that we get from Christ. It is not a case of getting an "opinion" from Him about death and the afterwards as we get Socrates' "opinion" in the *Phædo*. Christ knew what death meant, and He knew what lay beyond death. His Resurrection and His subsequent appearances to the disciples were only meant to assure them that when Jesus spoke to them about death and the beyond He was not giving them His views, but was imparting to them definite knowledge. He was giving them, not opinions, but real and accurate information. This is the truth about death and its afterwards, and life is delivered from fear and dread only as we frankly accept the information given.

Looking, then, at these verses as giving us

DEATH AND AFTERWARDS

Christ's information as to death and the afterwards, what do they tell us?

THE FATHER'S HOUSE

Well, first of all, they announce this tremendous fact—that on the other side of death lies the Father's house; not the grave, but the Father's house! Not extinction or unconsciousness, but the Father's house! Not some underworld into which the sun never shines, where we live as thin and shadowy ghosts, but the Father's house! Even in our Christian hymns we have not yet risen to the full height of our Lord's teaching. One of our most familiar and best loved funeral hymns ends each verse with this line:

Leave we now Thy servant sleeping.

Sleeping? No! His poor body may be worn out and asleep. But, then, he has done with his body. He has no further use for it! So far as this earthly tenement is concerned, he is finished with it. It is a case of "earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust." But *he* is not asleep. He was never more awake, alert, alive. *He* is not in that grave at all. He is in the Father's house. God has two houses. He may

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have more. But, so far as we humans are concerned, He has just two—this world and the world to come. So that throughout the long stretch of our existence we are never out of the Father's house. We are in the Father's house now. This is God's world and we see signs in it of His presence, and sometimes we are refreshed with fleeting glimpses of His face. The difference between the two houses is this : that in the house in the next world God's Presence is more fully and continuously realised. Perhaps that is because we ourselves are cleansed from our sin, and therefore, being pure in heart, we really see God. Anyhow, there is the fact : in the Father's house to which we pass we live in the constant realisation of God's presence. We see Him face to face, and therefore our joy is complete and unbroken. But the special point I want to make just now is this : that God's two houses are contiguous. There is no dreary distance between them. We do not leave the one to find ourselves out in the cold and the dark, "unhous'd, disappointed, unanel'd," as Shakespeare puts it. The one leads straight into the other. Death is just the door which opens from one into the other.

We bow our heads at going out—we think,
And enter straight another palace of the King's
Larger than this we leave, and lovelier.

That, then, is the first point in the teaching of Jesus about death and the afterwards which this passage suggests, and which, if really believed, takes away practically all the fear of death. We are not left houseless and homeless when this life is done. We *change* houses, that is all. "I know," says St. Paul bravely, accepting the word of Jesus upon the point, "that if this earthly tent of mine is taken down, I get a home from God, made by no human hands, eternal in the heavens." Now, there are many things I would like to say about the Father's house, but I limit myself to this one—that when we get there we shall feel it to be no strange place. Yes, I can believe that its glories surpass both speech and thought. John, in his Apocalypse, strains language in his attempt to describe it. He speaks of streets of gold and seas of glass and gates of pearl and walls of jasper. But the reality leaves John's imagery limping far behind. "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the mind of man the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him." And yet we shall not be oppressed or overawed by all this splendour. We shall not feel strange. We shall be quite "at home" in it. It is *the Father's house*. I dare say if we were invited to Buckingham Palace we should feel a bit stiff

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and shy and restrained. The unaccustomed splendour would oppress us. But the King's children feel just as free and familiar in Buckingham Palace as we do in our more modest dwellings. Buckingham Palace is their father's house; and we shall feel just like that about God's great house in Heaven. We shall not feel strange or constrained. It is the Father's house. For what does the Father's house mean but *home*? That is home—the place where our parents dwell. And “home” stands for ease and freedom and perfect happiness. We have no sense of constraint in our father's or mother's house. Even though it be a large and stately house, the child has the freedom of it all. Indeed, when we want to suggest perfect ease and happiness we say: “So and so is quite ‘at home.’” Well, that is how we shall feel when we exchange this familiar home for our new one. We shall not feel timid or frightened or strange when we reach it; we shall be quite “at home,” for it is our Father's house.

THE PREPARED PLACE

And the second thing I want you to notice is that in the Father's house there is for every one a “prepared place.” The Father's house

is large, and it has many mansions in it, for God has a vast multitude of children. But the individual is not overlooked or lost sight of in the crowd. For each one there is a "prepared place." "I go," Jesus said, "to prepare a place for you." It is Jesus who has prepared the place. For we should never have known there was a Father's house—certainly there never would have been a place in it for you and me—if Jesus had not "prepared" it. If He had not gone down to death and the grave, if He had not borne our sin and paid the terrible price of it, the door into that blessed and abiding house would never have been opened to us at all. "He only could unlock the gate of Heaven and let us in." But now He has prepared a place. He is to lead many sons into glory, and each son will find a place ready for him when he arrives. It is a dismal business to arrive at a place and find you are not expected. The unexpected guest is usually an unwelcome guest as well. It was a bitter experience for Joseph when he reached Bethlehem to find that, though Mary's hour was come, there was no room for them in the inn. There was nothing ready, nothing prepared ; so she had to lie down in the courtyard among the cattle, and there she brought forth her first-born son. But no such bitter and humbling experience will befall

us. We shall find everything ready for our coming. Dr. Dods who, as a rule, was the most prosaic and matter-of-fact of commentators, is stirred to something like poetry at the thought of the "prepared place." "When we expect a guest whom we love and whom we have written for," he says, "we take pleasure in preparing for his reception; we hang his room with the pictures he likes; we gather the flowers he admires and set them on his table; we go again and again to his room to see that nothing is lacking that can contribute to his comfort." And Christ, he says, is similarly occupied. He knows our tastes and capabilities and attainments, and He has identified a certain place as ours and holds it for us. "A prepared place." We shall not come to the Father's house as strangers. We shall not be unexpected. We shall not be—as are the guests in our huge modern caravanserais—mere items, mere numbers. We shall be known by name up there, and there will be a welcome ready for us at our coming. And, beside that general notion of preparedness and welcome, I get a suggestion in this little phrase of the permanence of individuality. Jesus knows us each one. "The good shepherd knows his sheep and calls them out by name." He knows what we can do and the kind of service we can render. And He

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has got waiting for us the very place that fits us, the niche that we can fill. For when this life ends we are not lost and merged in some vast totality of being, as waves sink back into the bosom of the sea. We continue ourselves. Personality endures. Our special gifts and capacities endure. And Jesus has got a place waiting for us in the Father's house, where all those capacities and gifts can find full and unfettered exercise. For in the Father's house up yonder there will be business for the Father still to do. He will have all sorts of errands for His children to fulfil. There will be still diversities of operations. But the tragedy of the misfit, so frequent and so pathetic down here, has no existence up yonder. Our gifts and powers will have a fair chance of coming to fruition—because for each of us there will be a “prepared place.”

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In these two sentences our Lord has been speaking of Death's afterwards. In the next He retraces His steps and talks to them about *death*. And this is how He speaks of death. You would scarcely believe He was talking of death at all, for He never uses the word, and what He says is so wonderfully sweet and

gracious. "If I go and prepare a place for you, I come again and receive you unto Myself." I am in nowise disposed to dispute with those who see in these words a reference to the Second Advent. Very likely the reference is there. But for most of the men who were listening to Him His "coming again to receive them unto Himself" could only refer to His coming to them in the hour of death. But what a view of death! "I come again and receive you unto Myself." That is what happens at death, according to our Lord Himself—He comes to us and takes us to be with Him. Never was such a view of death propounded in the ears of mortal men before. In the Old Testament death is a grim and evil thing, snatching men away from love and life and flinging them into some "pit" where existence—if it continues at all—is ghostlike and shadowy. Amongst the Greeks death was regarded as a foe bringing to an end everything that was warm and living and joyous, and they signified what they thought of death by the broken pillar which was one of their favourite graveyard emblems. Death was to them the cruellest foe of all—the last enemy, the King of Terror. But Jesus here gives Death another and a different aspect. He changes it from a foe to a friend, from a dread to a

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Deliverer. For in Death *He* comes ! “ I come again and receive you unto Myself.” And that is exactly what death meant to the New Testament saints, and that is why, not only had it no terror for them, but they were able to greet it with a cheer. The first of the Christians to die was Stephen. That was what death meant to Stephen—Jesus his Lord coming to fetch him. For that was what he cried as the stones came crashing down upon him : “ Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.” Lord Jesus ! He was there ready to receive him. That was what made Paul so ready to depart ; for that is what death meant to him—departing and being with Christ. And that was why John longed with an almost fierce longing for the end to come. He never thought of it as death. It was a case of the beloved Lord, on whose breast he had leaned at the Supper, coming to take him to Himself. “ Even so,” he cried, “ come quickly, Lord Jesus.” And wouldn’t it take all death’s sting away if we only thought of it like that—Jesus coming to fetch us ? I think one of the things that men dread in death is its loneliness. They have to say “ good-bye ” to lover and friend and acquaintance, and venture forth alone. But are we not quite wrong in thinking of death like that ? We are not really lonely. For when we enter on this last stage of our earthly

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journey, Jesus is there to take care of us. I remember how relieved I was when, on landing on the pier at Tuticorin, in South India, I found our missionary, Mr. Parker, there to meet us. I should have felt so much at a loss if I had had to make my own way in what was a strange country, amongst strange people speaking a strange language. But all my anxiety went when I saw Mr. Parker. From that moment I left everything to him. And when we enter upon the last stage of our life's journey we shall find Jesus is there to take care of us and see us safely into that other home of our Father. "I come again and receive you unto Myself."

HEAVEN

And then, finally, I get here a suggestion of Christ's view of Heaven. "That where I am there ye may be also." Our Lord Himself was very sparing in His words about the life to come. He didn't enter into details. He didn't attempt to describe its glories. He didn't tell us plainly. Sometimes we wish He had. We have all sorts of questions we should like to have asked Him, as, for instance, these: Shall we know one another and shall we love one another? Do our loved ones know about us,

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and what is happening to us? Especially when our hearts are sore, do we wish He had said something to meet these anxious questionings. But He didn't. He only talked of the Beyond in the most general way. I have my own reason for this reticence on the part of our Lord. I give it you for what it is worth. It may not satisfy you, but it satisfies me. I think Jesus said so little for the reason that, if He said more, our longing for that better land would be so intense that we should be unfit for our duties in this world. Do you remember how John Bunyan finishes the first part of his *Pilgrim's Progress*? As Christian and Hopeful entered in by the gate into the City, he says that he looked in after them, and behold, "the City shone like the sun; the streets also were paved with gold; and in them walked many men with Crowns on their heads, Palms in their hands and Golden Harps to sing praises withal. There were also of them that had wings, and they answered one another without intermission, saying 'Holy, holy, holy is the Lord,' which when I had seen," says the Dreamer, "I wished myself among them." And so it would be with us. If we could see into the Father's house and knew all about the blessedness of the saints, we should wish ourselves among them, wish it with such consuming

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longing as to be unfitted for the duties of the common day. And as God has His work for us to do down here, He has kept the full blessedness of life in the Father's house veiled from us. And yet enough has been told us to make us realise that Heaven is the abode of bliss. Take the hints given in these verses—It is the Father's house; there will be a "prepared place"; and especially this latter phrase, "where I am, there ye shall be also." To be with Jesus, is not that heaven enough for anybody? It was for these twelve men. Their fellowship with Jesus during the months, or perhaps years, they had been in His company had been pure joy to them. John, for example, could think of no heaven better than this, being allowed to pillow his head on the Master's breast. Well, that happiness was to be his in the Father's house. He was to be for ever where Jesus was. "To-day," said Jesus to the dying robber, "thou shalt be with Me in Paradise." I always feel that Jesus need not have added those words, "In Paradise." To be with Him was Paradise enough. Paul, when he thinks of Heaven, has nothing to say about golden streets and gates of pearl. Christ occupies his entire thought. Heaven is Christ, and Christ is Heaven. "To depart and be with Christ," he says, "is far better." And

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isn't that heaven enough for us still? "Where I am, there ye shall be also": doesn't that suffice? Isn't every conceivable blessedness implicit in it? Do you remember that little poem of Watson Gilder which expresses his devotion to Christ:

If Jesus Christ is a man,
And only a man—I say
That of all mankind I cleave to Him,
And to Him will I cleave away.

If Jesus Christ is a God,
And the only God—I swear
I will follow Him through heaven and hell,
The earth, the sea, and the air.

Jesus is the heart's desire. Jesus is the heart's delight. "I nothing lack if I am His and He is mine for ever." To be with Christ, that is heaven. All we can conceive of blessedness and joy is contained in these words: "Where I am, there ye shall be also." There are many things about Heaven which God has kept in shadow. But He has told us this—and it is enough: We shall be with Christ.

Have we a right to believe all this? Yes, we have. For Jesus *knew*. To make us sure, He went down into the grave, and on the third day He rose again. He took death and captivity captive. He revealed death, not as a terminus,

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but as a passage-way. He threw light on life and immortality. "O grave, where is thy victory? O death, where is thy sting? Thanks be to God who gaveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

FEB - MAY 2
mormon

“AS ONE THAT SERVETH”

JOHN xiii. 3, 4.—“Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He came forth from God, and goeth unto God, riseth from supper, and layeth aside His garments; And He took a towel . . .”

THE best commentary I know upon these verses is contained in that tremendous passage in his letter to the Philippians, in which St. Paul, speaking of the Incarnation of our Lord, says that, though he was “in the form of God, yet He counted it not a prize to be on an equality with God, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a slave.” “Being in the form of God,” *i.e.*, being *from the beginning*; Christ was essentially and eternally Divine. But He took “the form of a slave.” That was the guise in which He appeared on this earth of ours. When He became flesh, He took His place amongst the humblest of the humble and the poorest of the poor. From the “form of God” to the “form of a slave”—that was the measure of Christ’s self-emptying. I do not know whether Paul had this incident of the feet-washing in his mind when he penned that great passage. What I *do* know is that in this incident of the feet-washing that tremendous statement of the

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Apostle's is beautifully illustrated, and that upon this incident the Apostle's words are the finest and truest commentary. For what is it we have here but One who was in the form of God taking upon Him the form of a slave? For Jesus knew Himself to be in the "form of God." Listen to what the Evangelist says: "Jesus knew that the Father had given all things into His hands and that He came forth from God and goeth unto God." Jesus was conscious of His Divinity. And yet this Jesus who was in the form of God in the Upper Room that night took upon Him the form of a slave, for He rose from supper and "laid aside His garments and took a towel and girded Himself and began to wash His disciples' feet." He, into whose hands the Father had given all things, who had come from God and was going to God, washed the feet of Peter, and Thomas, and Philip, and even Judas! He took the "form of a slave."

For feet-washing was literally a slave's task. In the larger houses there was usually a slave whose special business it was to wash the feet of guests when they arrived, heated and dusty, with cooling water. We must suppose that the disciples took this humble duty in turns when there was no slave to discharge it for all. But on this particular evening not one of them offered to do it. The pitchers and the basin and

the towel were all there, ready for use, but no one pretended to see them. They took their place at the table, but no one gave any sign of intending to play the part of servant that night. And why was that? Because on the way to the Upper Room they had been contending which of them was greatest. It was not the first time they had quarrelled about their places in Christ's Kingdom. James and John, you remember, had tried to steal a march upon the rest of the disciples by getting their mother Salome to ask Jesus to promise beforehand that the two highest thrones should be given to them. On this particular evening, I should judge, the contention had been particularly keen and bitter, and so they came into the room, as Dr. Dods says, hot and angry and full of resentment, like so many sulky schoolboys. And no one would condescend to discharge this humble but grateful duty of feet-washing. John would not wash the feet of Peter; Peter would not wash the feet of John; Thomas would not wash the feet of Simon the Canaanite; Simon would not wash the feet of Thomas. For to wash the feet of the rest was to declare oneself the servant of all, and that was precisely what each was resolved he would not do. They stood on their dignity—a poor sort of thing to stand upon. There they sat, looking at the table, looking at the ceiling,

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arranging their dress, each resolved he would not confess himself a whit inferior to the others by performing the slave's office of washing their feet.

And so, after waiting some time to see what they would do, when it became apparent that they would do nothing, and when supper was now on the table, Jesus Himself arose and took the basin and the towel and began to wash the disciples' feet. The Lord and the Master performed the lowly office which the disciples were too proud to discharge. He took upon Him the form of a “slave.” And He did it although vividly conscious of His Divinity. That is what makes our Lord's action so remarkable. He did it at a moment when He was vividly aware of His Divine prerogative and His great and glorious destiny. “Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that He came from God and goeth unto God, riseth from supper and layeth aside His garments, and He took a towel and girded Himself and began to wash the disciples' feet.” Knowing all that, He did this. He washed His disciples' feet.

I

Look, to begin with, at the self-consciousness of Jesus as here described by the Evangelist :

“He knew that the Father had given all things into His hands.” I think Jesus always knew that God was with Him in a special and unshared way. But that does not prevent me from thinking that there were occasions in His life when He was peculiarly aware of it. I think the Baptism was such a time, when He heard the Divine voice saying: “This is My Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” I think the Transfiguration was another such time, when the heavenly voice was heard saying: “This is My Son, My chosen.” I think Passion Week was yet another such time, when, in reply to our Lord’s prayer, “Father, glorify Thy Name,” the Voice was heard saying: “I have both glorified it and will glorify it again.” It is worth noticing that these occasions when our Lord had this peculiar sense of God’s presence with Him were occasions when He faced the cost of man’s redemption and declared Himself willing to pay it. For at the Baptism that is what Jesus did. He accepted the office and task of sin-bearer. He consented to be numbered with the transgressors and to bear their iniquities. And, at the Transfiguration, Jesus and the heavenly visitors talked of the “exodus” which He was to accomplish at Jerusalem—a deliverance only to be won by the shedding of a blood more precious far than

the blood on the lintel of the homes of the Hebrews, which caused the destroying angel to pass over them. And again, in Passion Week, it was when Jesus was contemplating “that hour,” that bitter and tragic hour when He would hang upon the Cross branded as a malefactor, when He deliberately accepted that death of shame, that that sense of God’s favour and good pleasure swept over His soul. And so now. It had come to the last night. The Cross was looming large before Christ’s eyes. He knew that He, the Lamb of God, was about to offer the sacrifice which was to take away the sin of the world. He knew it, and with a sort of holy joy He faced it all and declared Himself willing to pay the awful price; and then there came, flooding and suffusing His soul, this overwhelming sense of God’s presence and favour and power. Jesus knew Himself at one with God.

“Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands.” “All things!” Jesus had known Himself possessed of Divine power all along, or, at any rate, since He had begun His ministry. It was in virtue of this power of God dwelling in Him and possessing Him that He had performed His miracles. That was the account He Himself gave of them: “The Father abiding in Me doeth His works.”

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In virtue of that power He had healed the sick, cleansed the leper, cast out devils, given sight to the blind, and life to the dead. But never did such a realisation of the Divine power resting upon Him and abiding in Him come home to the soul of Jesus as on this night in which He was betrayed. “Jesus knowing that the Father had given *all things* into His hands.” All authority in Heaven and earth! The right to exercise judgment! The destinies of the world! “All things!” It did not look like it at the time. He was about to fall into the hands of His foes. In a few hours from this He would appear to be a helpless prisoner in the hands of cruel enemies, without a single friend to stand by him. To any stranger who might enter Jerusalem on the morrow, Jesus on His Cross would appear a person who had nothing at all! No scrap of power or authority, else He would not have been hanging there. But Jesus knew differently. He knew that Cross was to be His throne. He knew that if He was lifted up He would draw all men unto Him. He knew that by dying He wasn't losing his Kingdom—He was gaining it. He saw in vision an adoring and worshipping world at His feet. To the world the Cross seemed to stand for complete and utter defeat; to Jesus it was the pledge of victory. Jesus did not march

to that Cross as one who had failed ; He marched to it as to His triumph. Jesus knew that the Father had given all things into His hands.

This sense of absolute sovereignty, says Bishop Westcott, "is the more impressive here in the prospect of apparent defeat." Jesus knew that things were not what they seemed—that the victory did not rest with the priests and Pilate, who combined to put Him to death. He knew that after the Crucifixion there would come Resurrection, and that after Good Friday there would be an Easter Day. "Jesus knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands." And it will profit us when defeat seems to be our lot to remember our Lord's confidence as He faced His Cross. Things are not exactly exhilarating with us just now. We have heard a great deal about dwindling congregations and half empty churches. We have had it dinned into us that the Church is not exerting the influence it did. Religion seems to be on the wane. It may be all true ; indeed, we admit the truth of much of it. But for all that we bate no jot of heart or hope. We know that to the Church, too, will come a day of Resurrection ; we know our world is to become Christ's world, for the Father has given all things into His hands.

And He knew this further. He knew that

4

at the finish. Jesus had that assurance in His soul on the night on which He was betrayed.

He was sure He was going to God. Judas and the priests were already plotting His death. Their hope and purpose was to consign Him to shame and contempt and abhorring. They did their utmost to cover Him with ignominy and scorn. They crucified Him between two thieves. Jesus knew all about it. Not an item in the whole catalogue of insult escaped Him. And yet, in face of it all, He knew that by way of the Cross and the grave it was to God He was going. Back to God—to the sunshine of His love, to the glory He had with the Father before the world was; back to the plaudits and the worship of the angelic host, back to the sympathy and the understanding and the adoration of the saints. I can believe that Jesus' heart was full of a solemn joy as He contemplated the Cross. One of the sacred writers says that for the joy that was set before Him He endured the Cross, despising shame. And this was part of that joy. He was going back to the blessedness of Heaven, going back to resume His seat at the right hand of His Father. Jesus knew that He was going—not to shame and death and forgetting—He knew that He was going to the Father!

II

And knowing all this, conscious of His Divine dignity, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands and that He came forth from God and goeth to God, He took a towel and girded Himself and began to wash His disciples' feet. He did it not *although* He knew, but *because* He knew. As Bishop Westcott puts it : " The knowledge that He was possessed of this Divine authority was the ground of His act of service." Because He knew Himself to be so great, He stooped to this great humility. Because He knew Himself to be in the form of God, He took upon Him the form of a slave. Remembering His rank, His majesty, His royal dignity, He made Himself the servant of all. This is not the way in which men ordinarily act. We make rank and station and culture and education reasons for *not* performing tasks we think menial. There are certain humble tasks which need to be done, but we do not think that they ought to be done by us. Somebody has to keep our streets clean, somebody has to plough the fields, somebody has to delve in the darkness for the coal that warms our houses, somebody has to sweat and strain in our foundries ; but such tasks are not for us, born

as we are, brought up as we are. There are all sorts of lowly but beautiful duties to be discharged—caring for the sick, ministering to the poor, looking after the child—and we hope that somebody will be found to discharge them, but we ourselves can scarcely be expected to do it. The very considerations that impelled Jesus to perform this act of lowly service have precisely the opposite effect upon us—they make us neglect the humble tasks. As Dr. J. A. Hutton says: “Remembering who He was, He rose and washed His disciples’ feet. Remembering who we are, we are tempted in various ways to gather our robes about us and pass on.” I suppose we avoid the lowly tasks out of regard for our own dignity. We think somehow we should lose caste if we engaged in some humble service. Perhaps it is because we are a bit uncertain about our dignity that we make such a fuss about it. It is always those whose social standing is a bit precarious who are most particular not to have any dealings with the “lower orders.” The people whose position is assured never bother about it. The real aristocrat can afford to be affable and friendly and at home with people. He leaves his dignity to look after itself. But, even if, by avoiding humble tasks and lowly duties, we preserve, as we think, our dignity, we miss something far

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more precious than dignity—we miss *greatness*. For greatness—that is the lesson our Lord would teach us by this incident—is not a matter of rank or wealth or culture, but of *service*.

"He that is greatest among you shall be servant of all," He said, and He illustrated that truth in His own life, for He is humanity's Greatest, because He was humanity's greatest Servant. And what we see illustrated in supremest fashion in the case of Jesus we see illustrated also on the level of our common humanity. The men and women who have stooped to serve their fellows—these are our greatest.

Who were the greatest people in the nineteenth century? I wonder if I should be far wrong if I mentioned Lord Shaftesbury, who made the care of the boys who were compelled to work as chimney sweeps and those other boys who were driven underground to work in the mines his own, and who laboured year in year out to help the wretched and the poor; and Florence Nightingale, who, though born to rank and wealth, devoted herself to the task of nursing the sick and wounded soldiers in the Crimea and then to the developing of the nursing movement which has made for thousands all the difference between misery and comfort, between life and death; and David Livingstone, who gave his whole life to the service of the African

negroes, to the amelioration of their miseries and their deliverance from the horrors of the slave trade. Lord Shaftesbury, Florence Nightingale, David Livingstone—they are our noblest, our greatest, our best. And they are our noblest and greatest and best just because they served. They stooped to lowly service—chimney sweeps, miners' children, wounded soldiers, half-savage Africans—they stooped to wash their feet. And that is the way to greatness still. The poor and the weary and the broken-hearted are at our doors. There is much that is repellent about them, and perhaps our natural tendency is to shrink from them. But it is just these people who are to be sought out and served. And when we minister to these people, when we lay our pride and our conventional dignity aside and befriend the sunken and the outcast and try to wash away some of the soil from their lives, when we seek to uplift them and comfort them, we show ourselves followers of Him who, though He knew that the Father had given all things into His hands, though He knew that He came from God and was going to God, girded Himself with the slave's apron. No! not *although* He knew, but *because* He knew—for it is Divine to stoop; it is Divine to serve. Christ was never more truly Godlike than when He washed

the disciples' feet. All the self-forgetting love of God was in the act. And we come nearest to that Divine love when we, too, stoop to serve and help and heal. "He that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

III

But another thought has been with me all the week as I pondered over these words—a thought suggested to me first by a chapter in one of Dr. Hutton's books. He entitles the chapter in which he discusses these verses: "The wave on which Christ crossed the bar." It was this which carried Him through all the dreadful hours that were to follow this peaceful little interval in the Upper Room. He knew that "He had come forth from God and was going to God." We make an entire mistake if we imagine that Jesus did not shrink from the pain and the shame that were so soon to be His lot. By the measure in which He had preserved the perfect purity and sensitiveness of His soul, he felt all the agony and insult of the Passion more keenly than ordinary men. For sin blunts the sensitiveness and dulls the feelings. But the fact that Jesus was without sin exposed Him the more to pain. Indeed,

you remember how two cries of shrinking broke from His lips. "Father, save Me from this hour," He cried on the day the Greeks asked to see Him. "Father, if it be possible," He prayed in the Garden, "let this cup pass." There was a depth of agony in the Passion and its accompaniments that none of us can fathom. Do you remember that couplet in that familiar hymn, the "Ninety and Nine"?

But none of the ransomed ever knew
How deep were the waters crossed,
Nor how dark was the night the Lord passed through,
Ere He found His sheep that was lost.

What gave Him courage to breast those deep waters? The tide that carried Him over the bar was just this sense of God that flooded His soul—this assurance that He was in the line of God's purpose; that He was come from God and was going to God. That gave Him strength to drink the bitter cup to its dregs, to taste death for every man! "Nevertheless, not as I will, but as Thou wilt."

In a sense, this washing of the disciples' feet was a prelude to a humbling of Himself that was greater far. To wash the dust of travel off the feet of His disciples, He took the form of a slave by taking the towel and girding Himself. But it was not to wash the dust of

travel-stained feet that Jesus came into the world, but to wash away the deeper stain wherewith sin has defiled the soul. And to accomplish that washing he had to stoop to a depth lower still. He had to become obedient unto death, yea, the death of the Cross. And He was equal to that deeper stooping because He knew He was in the line of the Divine will, because He knew He had come from God and was going to God. That sense of God, of God's approval, of union with God, swept away all fear. Jesus, knowing that He was come from God and goeth to God, riseth from supper and layeth aside His garments and girded Himself and began to wash the disciples' feet. And Jesus, knowing that He had come from God and goeth to God, a little later, left that quiet room and went out to sweat great drops of blood in Gethsemane, to face the rude mockery and insult of the Judgment Hall, to bear the spitting and the scourging, to have the nails driven into His hands and feet on Calvary, to endure the horror of great darkness that fell upon His soul. I say He went out to confront all that, and the wave that carried Him over the bar, the motive that made Him brave to bear it all was this: He knew that He came from God and goeth to God.

And I want to finish what I have to say on

this verse by adding this word—that that same wave will carry *us* across any bar of difficulty or sorrow that may confront us in the course of our life's voyaging. Do you remember how it carried Paul over all the fears connected with that last journey of his to Jerusalem? He knew that bonds and imprisonment awaited him. His friends at every stopping-place tried to prevent him from continuing his journey. But he went “bound in the spirit.” He had an overwhelming sense that this was what God wanted him to do. He was sure God was sending him; he was sure he would find God in Jerusalem. So he went, ready, not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem, for the name of the Lord Jesus. And that same sense of God will help us over every rough place which may have to be crossed in the way of duty. It is a tremendous strength to feel the hand of the Lord upon us. Indeed, that is the only way in which to live bravely and well—always to remember that we came from God and are going to God. That we *came from God*—that we were sent here on business; that we have a work to do and a mission to fulfil; that we have a character to form and a soul to win and our part to play in making the world a happier and better place. And that we *are going to God*—amongst other

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things to give an account of how we have fulfilled our mission and used our gifts and performed our task. I say no one can live well who does not constantly bear these two things in remembrance—whence we came and whither we go. When men forget them, life becomes thin and sordid and ignoble. But life is bound to be high and serious for the man who remembers that He came forth from God and is going to God.

And this same wave will carry a man safely and triumphantly over the last bar of all. That is what the end means for us all—we go to God. Not to extinction or nothingness, but to God! And while that may be a shuddering thought to those who have ignored and neglected Him, it is a source of solemn thankfulness to those who, through Christ, have got to know Him as Father! That is the wave that will carry us triumphantly over that last bar—to know that we are going to the Father. It is with us as it is with children going home for the holidays. There is a bit of regret, perhaps, at parting from one's companions, but at the end of a brief railway journey there are father and mother waiting! And at the end of that brief passage-way we call death the Father is waiting to fold us in His arms. "Thanks be to God who giveth us the victory, through our Lord

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Jesus Christ." We shall meet the end, when it comes, with the serenity and confidence wherewith our Lord met it, if only we remember, as He remembered, that we came forth from God and that we go to God.

Good Conclusion

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LUKE xxii. 31, 32.—“Simon, Simon, behold Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you as wheat : but I made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not ; and do thou, when once thou hast turned again, stablish thy brethren.”

PETER did not fall for lack of warning. He fell because he paid no heed to the warnings given. More than once our Lord told him in set terms what would happen. But, so far as Peter was concerned, the warnings fell on absolutely deaf ears. He could not claim that the rock on which his barque struck and well-nigh foundered was a sunken and uncharted rock ; he sailed straight on to it, though its bells were clashing out their warnings and telling him of danger. The reason for Peter's neglect of these repeated warnings was, I believe, twofold. First of all, he had complete confidence in his own courage. He was by nature a strong and forceful personality, and he honestly believed he could stand up to any menacing peril without flinching. And, secondly, he was so entirely and completely devoted to Jesus that the very idea of defection and cowardice seemed wildly and absurdly impossible. Peter really meant what he said

when he declared that with Jesus he was ready to go both to prison and to death. For his love for Jesus was, in very truth, the master-passion of Peter's life. That a man thus strong in will and so entirely devoted to Jesus as Peter was should fall so shamefully and disastrously as he did lends peculiar point and emphasis to the apostolic exhortation, "Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall."

The verse of my text contains our Lord's final warning to this impulsive but devoted disciple of His. It was spoken in the Upper Room on the night in which He was betrayed and after the Supper. Coming events had cast their shadow over the mind of Christ. And perhaps the deepest shadow of all was cast by the thought that there was treachery in the inner circle of the Apostolate, amongst the men whom He had called His friends. "Behold," He had said, with a breaking heart, "the hand of him that betrayeth Me is with Me on the table." And a shadow only a little less deep was cast by the realisation that, while one would be guilty of the baseness of betraying Him, the other eleven would all desert Him. "Ye are they," He said, with a touching note of gratitude in His voice, "which have continued with Me in My temptations." They had stood by Jesus in all His trials. They had

clung to Him when the crowds turned their backs upon Him. But a temptation was about to take place in which they would not "continue." Jesus saw all these men forsaking Him, fleeing for dear life and leaving Him alone in the hands of His foes. Jesus' mind was oppressed with this sense of impending danger. He felt the Tempter was present in that quiet room. Judas had already succumbed to his arts! And the rest of them were in mortal peril. And the danger to each, says Godet in his comment on this verse, was in proportion to the greater or less amount of alloy which his heart contained. That was why Jesus addressed his warning specially to Peter. "Simon, Simon," He said. There is something peculiarly solemn and impressive in the doubling of the name! And you will notice that it is by the old name "Simon" that Jesus addresses him. When Andrew first brought him to Jesus, Jesus addressed him like this, "Thou art Simon, the son of John; thou shalt be called Peter," which means "a Rock." And, again, after that great confession at Cæsarea Philippi, Jesus said to him, "I also say unto thee, that thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My Church." But he was a long way yet from being a rock-like man. The old shifty, unstable, unreliable Simon—the kind

of Simon his fellow-fishermen on the lake knew so well—was still there. “Simon, Simon,” said Jesus, using the old name of His disciple’s unregenerate days, “behold, Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you as wheat.”

You will best understand that phrase “asked to have you,” or, as the R.V. margin puts it, “obtained you by asking,” by turning to the first chapter of Job, where Satan is represented as asking God’s permission to “tempt Job,” to put him to the test, to see whether his religion was not entirely due to the favourable circumstances in which he was placed. And so here he is represented as asking God’s permission to put the Twelve to the proof, and he undertakes to prove that at bottom the best of His disciples is but a Judas at heart. “Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you that he might sift you as wheat”—that he may prove you are not wheat at all, but worthless chaff. He asked for *all* the disciples. But he asked specially for Peter. He concentrated his attack upon Peter. Partly because of Peter’s natural disposition. The very impulsiveness of Peter marked him out as a likely victim. The man who can rise to great heights can often sink to great depths. Outbursts of courage are often succeeded by seasons of weakness and fear. There was a much greater

chance of success with a man of mercurial temperament like Peter than with a stolid, phlegmatic, but stubbornly faithful man like Thomas. But chiefly did Satan concentrate his attack upon Peter because he was the natural leader of the Twelve. Satan brought his guns to bear—if I may use the simile—upon the strategic point, the absolutely critical position. Peter was the chief and the best. He was to be the future leader of the Christian Church. If he could only make Peter his captive, he might smash the whole business and bring Christ's work to naught. "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you that he might sift you as wheat." And when I think of Peter, with his impulsive and unstable temperament, exposed to all the wiles and stratagems and assaults of Satan, he seems to me to be in parlous plight.

But that is not the whole of the picture. If Jesus had said that Satan had asked to have Peter to sift him as wheat and had left it there, implying that Peter had only his own strength to rely upon in his fight against Satan, there could have been but one end to Peter's story. His life's barque would have sunk like lead in the stormy waters. But the picture is this. Satan on the one side trying to take Peter, and on the other Jesus praying for him: "Satan hath

asked to have thee . . . but I made supplication for thee." At the same time that Satan asked for Peter, Jesus made supplication for him! That alters the case. There may be failure and defection and cowardly denial in front of Peter, but there cannot be irretrievable ruin. "I made supplication for thee that thy faith fail not"—that it may not fail utterly, once for all. Temporary eclipse there might be, but not final failure. The plotting Satan is no match for the praying Christ. And so Jesus, in forecasting the history of this disciple of His, sees beyond the failure recovery and restoration. "Do thou, when once thou hast turned again, stablish thy brethren." When thou hast turned again! Not all the arts and wiles and powers of Satan can keep possession of a man who is guarded and defended by the prayers of Christ.

"Satan asked to have you . . . but I made supplication for thee." That is the contrast that caught my attention. The plotting Satan and the praying Christ! For in it I seemed to see something true not simply of Peter, but of every human soul, and of the corporate life of this world of ours. In the Epistle of Jude we have reference to the old Jewish legend of the Archangel Michael contending with the devil about the body of Moses—Satan wishing to

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carry it away and Michael wishing to bury it. That may be legend, but a real conflict is going on every day and every hour, not over a dead body, but over the souls of living men—a conflict between Satan desiring to have them and Christ desiring to save them. This is the everlasting world-drama in picture form. Good and evil for ever contend for the mastery. The flesh lusteth against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh. There is always Satan seeking to have us, but always, thank God, there is always Jesus making supplication for us.

I

To begin with, there is always Satan seeking to have us. Jesus, it is perfectly clear, believed in a personal evil spirit. And, although the modern mind is inclined to put Satan in the same class with fairies and elves and hobgoblins, and such creatures of the primitive imagination, I have never seen reason, for my own part, for thinking that Satan is a mythical personage. I see no difficulty in believing that there is a personal evil spirit of real if limited power—indeed, the facts of life, quite apart from the witness of this old Book, supply us with ample reasons for believing that Satan is

no mere bogey. There are certain hideous obscenities in connection with some pagan worships, there are monstrous lusts and unspeakable cruelties of which men are guilty which can only be accounted for by saying they are devil-inspired. More significant still are the evil thoughts that obtrude themselves into pure minds—thoughts abhorrent to such minds, which are not suggested by anything from without—which are inexplicable unless there is outside of us some evil power always intent upon tempting, luring, goading us into sin. And Satan is always seeking to have us. Sometimes he works upon our own evil natures. For without in any way committing myself to any doctrine of original guilt or of total depravity—the doctrine of original sin simply states what is a plain and undeniable fact. We are born with a certain bias to evil. The dice seem loaded against us from the start. We inherit certain base instincts and unholy appetites—all that St. Paul means by those words of his “the flesh.” All this is not to deny that we are born with a certain original goodness too—a certain capacity for love and purity, a certain hunger for God. But the baser instincts are the more clamorous and imperious. It takes effort and struggle to be good. It takes no effort at all to be wicked. All we need do

to bring ourselves into the pit of shame is just to let ourselves go. But we keep and win virtue only at the point of the sword. I sometimes think that our fleshly lusts are so strong because they get so long a start over the aspirations of the soul. For our fleshly appetites assert themselves as soon almost as life begins, but it takes time before the soul awakes. Anyhow, there these baser instincts are, clamorous and insistent. And Satan seeks to have us by appealing to them. That is how he appeals to youth—he attacks them through their physical appetites. And, alas! in case after case he gets them.

And sometimes he seeks to get men by seductions that appeal to them from without. Perhaps this is not really another method, but just another aspect of the same method. Our baser instincts might remain quiescent were they not excited and inflamed by seductions from without. On the other hand, seductions from without would cease to be dangerous were there no base instincts within to which they could appeal. It is just a case of the powder and the match. The powder—the inflammable stuff—is there in all our natures, and the temptations of the world outside supply the match. And when match touches powder then comes the explosion. And temptations to evil abound

in these days. I suppose no age has been without its incitements to wickedness—but sometimes I think the incitements to folly and sin are more numerous and more shameless and more insistent than ever they were. The theatres, if report be true, seem to deal largely in filth. They get as near the verge of indecency as they can. I noticed that one theatrical manager had the courage to dismiss a woman performer because of her coarse and cynical references to her own sex. And she retorted that he might be fit to run a Sunday school, but he was not fit to run a music-hall—as if prurient and suggestive talk was the natural and fitting thing for the music-hall. And apparently that woman has many to agree with her—for most of the plays seem to make their appeal to what in us is nasty and vile. I think of the pabulum purveyed in these places and to those who frequent them I seem to hear this warning addressed—“Satan desires to have you, that he may sift you as wheat.” And there is our literature—much of it poisonous and unclean, dragging the name “love” into the mud, glorifying lawless passion, apologising for adultery and lust, scoffing at the ancient sanctities of marriage and home, much of it clever and brilliant, but full of peril to the moral life ; and to those who delight in this kind of

thing I seem to hear this warning addressed :
 " Behold, Satan desires to have you, to sift you
 as wheat."

And Satan works not only upon men's passions, he works also upon their fears. When he cannot wheedle and seduce men into evil, he bullies them into it. And it is none the less Satan that does it that he uses as his instruments companions in shop and office, and sometimes members of the same household. It was by playing on his fears that he got momentary hold of Peter. For fear he might be put in the dock side by side with Jesus, he denied that he even knew Him. And, for fear of the gibes and insults of foolish companions, men deny Him still. Young folk bred in Christian homes, coming into the big town and finding themselves amongst godless associates, abandon their religion and turn their backs on Christ.

Satan is amazingly busy in our world. There is no one immune from his wiles and his assaults. He desires to have us all, that he may sift us as wheat. And he seems to succeed in getting hold of a great many. Indeed, if that was how the case stood—we poor human creatures, with our biased natures and our inclinations to evil, and Satan desiring to have us, and using all his devices to ensnare us—I should utterly despair of mankind. Not

one of us in such a case could live pure and speak true. Not one of us could keep faith and a good conscience. Not one of us but would make shipwreck. Not one of us but would go down in ruin and shame. What gives me hope is that I see not simply Satan desiring to have us, but I see also *Jesus praying for us*. If there is an evil and destructive power at work in our world—there is also a saving and redeeming power. If Satan is busy seeking to destroy, Jesus is busy seeking to deliver and save. Not of Peter only can it be said, but of every human creature: “Satan hath asked to have thee . . . but I have made supplication for thee.” But I! That *but* changes the world for me! It transfigures the entire prospect. Satan doesn’t get it all his own way. Jesus Christ is also at work. He works by means of the holy influence of the home. He works by means of the teaching and example of godly parents. He works by means of church and school, by hymn and prayer and the words of the preacher. And sometimes He seems to dispense with means altogether, and to work directly on the human heart, as he did in the case of John Bunyan—when, as Bunyan was playing tip-cat on the Sunday, between the first and second blow of the club he seemed to hear a voice, and with the eyes of his understanding saw the Lord Jesus looking down upon

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him with displeasure. In all kinds of ways Jesus pleads with men, and by means of holy memories and the warnings of conscience comes between them and Satan's temptations. "I have made supplication for thee!" I said a moment ago that it was fatally easy for men to fall—what with the base instincts of their own natures and the incitements of the world. But when I look at this other picture—Jesus praying—I begin to feel that it is difficult ever to fall into irremediable ruin. *Facilis descensus Averni*—the way to the pit is easy! Yes, from one point of view it is. And yet, from another point of view, it is hard, it is difficult to the point of impossibility; for a man must get past the seeking love of Christ, he must get past the Cross of Christ, he must get past the prayers of Christ before he can make his bed in Hell. At any rate, here is my hope for men. Satan desires to have us, but the mighty Son of God is making supplication for us.

II

And all that I have been saying of the individual man is true also of the *corporate life of the world*. Satan desires to have it. The evil

power seeks assiduously to gain control. He does it by stirring up suspicion and ill-will between the various classes within a nation, and by sowing seeds of discord and strife between the nations of the world. Consider the state of things within our own borders—how again and again we are cursed by industrial strife, how suspicion and ill-will between employer and employed threatens to bring this land of ours to the dust. And consider the state of things on the international stage. Greed, selfishness, and aggressive ambition are sowing seeds of discord amongst the nations. Militarists preach with amazing effrontery their exploded doctrine that the best way to secure peace is to prepare for war. Diplomats seem to have learned nothing and forgotten nothing, but follow still the old tortuous ways. With the result that Europe seethes with the restlessness of fear. There is great Russia an outcast amongst the nations; there are France and Germany suspicious and distrustful of one another; there is Poland armed to the teeth; there are Italy and Jugo-Slavia looking at one another with glaring eyes, like dogs which are only held from flying at one another's throats by leash; there are the Balkans to this day a hot-bed of suspicion and hatred and violence. And all nations seem to be busy building

partition walls against one another and every such partition wall is a further cause of irritation and friction and possible strife. The world's sky is black with menacing clouds. I think of the sinister forces at work, and this phrase comes home to me: Satan desires to have this old world of ours, that he may hurl it into ruin and destruction. And, quite frankly, I should despair of this world if I could see nothing but scheming diplomats, and militarists ever plotting for larger armaments, and chemists in secret preparing deadly gases—if I could see nothing but the jealousies and suspicions, the enmities and hatreds, which exist between the nations.

But I see something else. I see Jesus making supplication for this old world of ours—this perverse and wayward world which yet He loved so well as to die for it. Satan is busy enough in our world, but he hasn't the field to himself. Jesus is busy too. If the Devil is active seeking to destroy it, Jesus is active seeking to save it. He works through human agencies. He works through every peacemaker who tries to foster the spirit of mutual goodwill and trust; He works through the League of Nations, which seeks to substitute law and reason for the ordeal of battle; He works through His Church, ever proclaiming the great truth of the Fatherhood of God. And in many another way unseen of

us He works upon the minds and consciences of men. *Jesus is making supplication for us.* And it is the realisation of that that keeps me from despair. I confess frankly if I did not believe in God, a God active in our world, I should be a blank pessimist. To be without God is to be without hope. But I see Jesus making supplication. I see Jesus active on behalf of the world's salvation. And that makes all the difference. Clouds are black and skies are lowering, and there are the rumblings and mutterings of storm about, but I refuse to believe the world is going out in ruin and disaster—for Jesus is making supplication for it.

III

For the stratagems of Satan are no match for the prayers of Jesus. "Simon, Satan asked to have you, that he might sift you as wheat: but I made supplication for thee, that thy faith fail not; and do thou, when thou hast turned again, stablish thy brethren." The issue of all Satan's attempts upon Simon was failure. Granted, it looked as if Satan had him when he denied with curses in the Judgment Hall that he ever knew the Christ. But Jesus had made supplication that his faith should not

utterly fail. Simon was cast down, but not destroyed; Jesus, forecasting His disciple's history, sees, beyond his momentary lapse, recovery and restoration. "Do thou, when thou hast turned again." When thou hast turned again! Satan was not to have Simon "for keeps." Satan's devices availed nothing against the prayers of Jesus. And Jesus does for men and women still what He did long ago for Simon. Satan seeks to have them, and for a time seems to have them in his grip. But continually Jesus is rescuing them from Satan's power. He gives release to the captives and opening of prisons to them that are bound. They "turn again." Satan cannot keep the men for whom Jesus prays. I think of a man once connected with this church. Satan seemed to have him at one period of his life—for he was profane and drunken and utterly neglectful of religion. But the memories of home and of Sunday school never wholly died within him. And one day he strolled into this church, and Jesus laid hold of him. By those early memories Jesus had been making supplication for him. And at length he "turned again," and spent the rest of his life in establishing the brethren. When thou hast turned again! And sometimes I wonder whether Satan can retain his hold of any one for ever. I wonder whether,

in the long run, every one will not "turn again." For Jesus is making supplication for men, and I dare sometimes to think that the mighty Intercessor's prayers must at last prevail.

And I dare cherish the same great hope for our world. I do not close my eyes to the evil influences that are at work. I do not shut my ears to the sounds of dissension and strife. But I refuse to believe that the world is rushing to destruction—for I see Jesus making supplication for it. To talk about a war next year which is to be the end of all things, to me is something worse than pessimism, it is sheer atheism. The future of this world according to Scripture is this—the kingdoms of this world are to become the Kingdoms of one God and of His Christ. The power of evil is limited, the ultimate triumph rests with God. Jesus' supplications are to be answered. He is to see of the travail of His soul and to be satisfied. In the pages of the world's history yet to be written there may be many a sad and tragic page—but the final page will tell of a world which has "turned again," for it will tell of a world in which every knee shall bow at the name of Jesus, and every tongue confess that He is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

CHRIST AND THE UNIVERSE

HEBREWS i. 2, 3.—“Through whom He made the worlds.”
“Upholding all things by the word of His power.”
“Whom He appointed heir of all things.” “By Him
He created the world.” “He sustains the universe
with His word of power.” “Whom He appointed
heir of the universe.”—*Moffatt.*

I AM constantly being struck by the sweep, the boldness, the magnificence of the claims the Bible makes for God. There are some people who can see God nowhere; the Bible sees God everywhere. There are some who clean banish Him from the world; the Bible sees God in every event that happens. It is God that worketh all and in all. You remember, for example, the uncompromising claim Isaiah makes for God: “I am the Lord and there is none else: I form the light and create darkness: I make peace and create evil: I the Lord do all these things.” There is a story told that during a rather exciting American election a candidate telegraphed to the headquarters of his party asking if the party could claim credit for a certain legislative measure, and the telegraphic reply came back, “Claim everything.” Well, the Bible claims everything for God. I was made to feel all this

afresh as I read these opening verses of the Epistle to the Hebrews. It is not God the Father, but God the Son who is the subject of these sentences. But what vast claims the writer makes for Him! Speaking of the relation of Christ to this universe of ours, he says three tremendous things about Him. First of all, he says that He created it. Secondly, he says that He sustains it. And, thirdly, he says that He is to inherit it. I say it is about the Son he makes these tremendous statements, and the Son he identifies with the historic Jesus. That is to say, it is for the Jesus who was born in Bethlehem and died upon the Cross and rose again the third day that he makes these colossal claims. Upon which fact I have just one remark to make as I pass on—by the time this letter came to be written, the Christian Church thought of Jesus in terms of God, and spoke of Him as being on an equality with God. I cannot see how any one with this particular Scripture in his hand can contend that the claim of Deity for Jesus was not made till after a long process of idealisation had taken place. It doesn't matter who was the author of this Epistle—it may have been Apollos, it may have been Priscilla, it may have been one of Paul's companions—scholars tell us it was written probably as early as A.D. 64, certainly

not later than A.D. 80. All of which goes to prove beyond possibility of challenge or dispute that to the first Christian disciples Jesus was not simply a Galilean prophet—the carpenter from Nazareth, as we moderns delight to speak of Him. He was something infinitely greater. He was the supreme and exalted Lord. He was the everlasting Son. God and Christ are, with them, almost convertible terms. They attribute things indifferently now to one and now to the other. For example, in the third chapter of the Epistle the writer states, “He that built all things is God.” In one of the clauses of my text he attributes the work of creation to the Son, “through whom also He made the world.” It is just an illustration of that equality with God which the early Church claimed for Christ. It is a totally false reading of history to imagine that the Deity of our Lord is just an ecclesiastical dogma—the result of long and acute theological discussion and debate. Perhaps the primitive Church did not try to reason about it or to give it dogmatic expression, but belief in Christ as God was the very heart of the primitive apostolic faith.

But all that is by way of being a parenthesis, though I hope not altogether a useless one. What I really want to do is to call your attention to what the writer says

here about the relationship between the Divine Son and the created world, or "the universe," as Dr. Moffatt phrases it. The writer makes these three great claims. The Son created the universe. He sustains it. He is to inherit it, *i.e.*, it is to become wholly and entirely His. Here is a great and satisfying philosophy of the universe. It begins, continues, and ends in Christ. He was in its past; He is in its present; He is to fill its future. Let me speak with you briefly of each of these points—to see if we can heartily believe them.

CHRIST AND CREATION

The first claim the author makes is that Christ was the instrument of creation. "Through whom also He made the worlds." "In the beginning *God* created the heavens and the earth," says the opening sentence of Genesis. It is only the hopeless and most pedantic literalist who will boggle over the fact that creation is attributed in one place to the Father and in another to the Son. Father and Son were both engaged in the work of creation, as Father and Son were both engaged in the work of redemption. The love of Father and Son found expression in creation; and that same love—when the world had gone wrong—found

expression in redemption. But the Son was with the Father in creation. "All things were made by Him," says St. John, "and without Him was not anything made that hath been made." "Through Him," says the writer of this Epistle, taking up and confirming John's word, "He [*i.e.*, God] made the worlds." Now, I repeat this is a great and satisfying answer to the mind's questioning as to the origin of our universe. It is important to remember that science has nothing to say as to ultimate origins. Science deals with phenomena, with certain physical facts that come within the range of sense-perception. "In its researches into the dim beginning of things it has got back to the atom, and back of the atom to electrons, and back of the electrons to the ether as the ultimate medium composing the material universe"; but it is still no nearer the real beginning of things. Atoms, electrons, ether—where did they come from? Professor Ray Lankester says quite definitely that "No sane man has ever pretended, since science became a definite body of doctrine, that we know, or ever can hope to know or conceive of the possibility of knowing, whence this mechanism has come, why it is there, whither it is going, and what there may or may not be beyond and beside it which our senses are incapable of appreciating. These

things are not explained by science and never can be." It would have been well if scientists had always been as modest as Professor Lankester. For, again and again, they have dogmatised about the beginnings of things, and have tried to make people believe that they live in a mechanical universe. But it is well to remember that when scientists talk about ultimate beginnings they are simply guessing. And when they guess that the world has just grown—that it has just evolved into the world we see and know—they are making a guess against which the human intelligence simply rebels. Long ago Lucretius, the Latin poet, propounded the theory that the world was the result of a fortuitous concourse of atoms—anticipating the kind of account many materialistic scientists give still. But it is as impossible to believe that our world just "happened" as it would be to believe that the letters of the alphabet came together by accident to form the plays of Shakespeare—that Portia's great speech about mercy, and Hamlet's soliloquy about death, and John o' Gaunt's panegyric about England were the result of a "fortuitous concourse" of letters. When we read these mighty and moving passages we know that behind them was a great mind beating out its own deep thoughts and then expressing

them in words of imperishable beauty. Behind Shakespeare's plays stands Shakespeare himself. And it is just as impossible to maintain that our world "happened" by accident. For there is *mind* in it. It is a rational universe. Indeed, men are able to understand the universe just because there is mind in it. If there were no mind in it and behind it, it would be as unintelligible and as meaningless as an idiot's speech. Science itself is based upon the rationality of the universe. Were there no rationality there could be no science. Well, where did the rationality come from? You can't attribute mind to matter, to atoms or electrons or the ether. There is one satisfying solution of the problem of the origin of this world, and that is to believe that it is the product of an infinite, directive Mind. "In the beginning God created." "Through Him He made the worlds." And remember that evolution does not touch the truth of creation. What evolution does is to substitute creation by process for creation by direct and immediate fiat. But in either case the idea of creation is inevitable. And, when it comes to creation, God is the only satisfying and sufficient explanation of it. Some of the greatest scientists freely admit it. Here, for example, is Sir W. F. Barrett's conclusion: "The final analysis of

the physicist pushes out beyond the boundary of the seen, compelling us to believe, as we were told long ago, that what is seen hath not been made out of things which do appear, but is the direct, continuous offspring of an unseen universe and an indwelling yet transcendent Power." And here is Professor Thomson, one of the most brilliant scientists of our day, saying the same thing in simpler language, when, after tracing the cosmos back to the nebula, he proceeds: "And if you like to add, In the beginning was the Logos, the Word, science has no word to say against it." "By faith we understand that the worlds have been framed by the word of God," says the writer of this Epistle in a later chapter. It is by faith we believe it. We cannot mathematically prove it. But it is a faith that carries its own confirmation with it, for it explains the facts and it satisfies the heart. That, then, is the first great truth about the relationship of Christ and the material universe: "Through Him God made the worlds."

II

But in the course of these opening verses the writer goes on to make a second tremendous claim for Christ. He not only created the

universe, but He sustains it. He upholds all things by the word of His power, or, as Moffatt translates it, "He sustains the universe with His word of power." Paul makes exactly the same claim for Christ in a great passage in his letter to the Colossians, where he says that, "in Him [*i.e.*, in Christ] were all things created, and He is before all things and in Him all things consist," or, as the last phrase might be more accurately translated, "in Him all things cohere." It is as if the Apostle would say that the universe would cease to be a universe, it would tumble to pieces, but for the fact that Christ keeps it together. For Christ did not simply create the world and then leave it. He remains in it, directing it, ruling it, controlling it. We have reason to be thankful to the evolutionists for a new realisation of this truth. For evolution teaches that creation is not an immediate act, but a process. The world is not so much *made*, as becoming. The Power that created it is still at work in it: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." He upholds all things by the word of His power.

This is true of the physical order. For it is an *order*. There is nothing haphazard or accidental about the succession of the seasons, or the ebb and flow of the tides, or the orbits of the stars. These are evidences of what the scientists

call "purposive intelligence," which lead inevitably to the conclusion that there is a "directive factor." And this purposive intelligence is possessed of Infinite Energy. And it is this Infinite Energy possessed of intelligence and thought which keeps the universe together and directs its various movements. If we could conceive of that Infinite Energy withdrawn, the universe would crash into hideous and hopeless ruin. But what is this Infinite Energy which is dowered with thought but God? Mere force does not *think*. Mere force is incapable of forming a plan. But there is both thought and purpose in the universe. It is a rational and intelligible universe. Therefore we are justified in attributing personality to this Infinite Energy of which science speaks. We speak of it not as *it*, but as *He*. This is the Christian statement of the scientific account of the invisible, all-pervasive Infinite Energy which works throughout the universe and keeps it together. "He sustains the universe with the word of His power."

And as there is evidence of thought and purpose in the material universe, so is there also evidence of a directing and overruling mind in the affairs of men. "There's a Divinity that shapes our ends." There is a deep and unconquerable faith in the minds of men in

Providence. Evidences of purpose and direction in the affairs of men are not as obvious and unmistakable as are the evidences of plan and purpose in the material world. And that for a perfectly plain and simple reason. In Nature the will of the Creator is unchallenged. There is nothing there to thwart it or to resist it. Christ's writ runs throughout the measureless reaches of space. But when it comes to the realm of *human* nature, the case is altered. For men are constantly resisting, challenging, thwarting Christ's will for them. Christ doesn't get His way with men—at any rate, not immediately and without dispute. Man can erect His own will against the will of his Lord. The result is that plan and purpose are not so clearly discerned in the history of mankind. Indeed, some people would deny Providence altogether. They tell us it is impossible to reconcile any doctrine of sovereignty with the fact of human freedom. And it may be impossible for us to *see* how the one fits in with the other. And yet in the interests of the sanity of the world we must believe in both. We believe in human freedom, otherwise the world would cease to be a moral world, because, if there is no freedom, there can be no responsibility. We believe in sovereignty, otherwise the world would be a meaningless world—it would be like a ship

left with its engines still running but with no one to steer it or to direct its course.

And, as a matter of fact, over long stretches of history we can see evidences of the guidance of an overruling Mind. there is what Matthew Arnold calls a "stream of tendency." There are eddies and whirlpools, and backwaters and twists in the stream—but the stream is there, and it is making its way towards some infinite sea. Sometimes we seem to *see* the working of such an overruling Power. I had an illustration of that the other day. I was talking with one on whom immense responsibilities rested in the Great War. He was speaking about that terrible time when the Germans crumpled up our Fifth Army. Talking with Hugo Stinnes after peace had been declared, he asked him why the Germans hadn't pushed on, seeing the way was plain and open before them. And Stinnes replied, "The snow came and clogged all our transport, and influenza smote our troops a fortnight before it smote yours." "Nobody must tell me," said my friend, "that there is no Providence." And Providence is at work even when we cannot see its working. The destinies of our world are not at the mercy of the clashing and conflicting wills of men. "The Lord reigneth." God the Son *overrules*. He

makes the very wrath of men to praise Him. Because He overrules, the history of mankind is making slowly but surely towards its appointed end. Because He rules we can believe our world is a sane world. It is not a chaos, but a cosmos. There is purpose and meaning in its life. "He upholds all things by the word of His power."

III

But perhaps the most stupendous claim the writer makes for Christ is this. He not only made the universe; He not only sustains it; but He is to inherit it. God has appointed Christ heir of all things. The universe is to be entirely His one day. His writ is to run in the world of men as it runs now in the world of Nature. It is men who have rebelled against Him and broken away from His rule. But *men* are to obey Him as suns and stars and winds and seas obey Him now. He is to be the *heir of the universe*. This unknown writer is simply repeating here a magnificent assurance we come across more than once in St. Paul's writings. "All things," he says in one place, "have been created through Him and *unto* Him." "Unto Him"—that is the purpose of creation—that all created things may become

the possession of Christ: they are created "unto Him." "In the name of Jesus," he says in another place, "every knee shall bow, of things in heaven and things on earth and things under the earth." Paul with his spiritual eye sweeps through every realm of being—Heaven, earth, Hades—and everywhere he sees Jesus' rule acknowledged, no single spot where He is not obeyed. "All things are to be subjected unto Him," he says in yet another place. "He is to abolish all rule and all authority and power," and then He will surrender the Kingdom to God, even the Father, and God shall "be all in all." That is the destined end of our world: Christ is to inherit it. It is His by right already. He has a double title to it. It is His by creation. It is His also by redemption. But His ownership is disputed. His rights are challenged. His rule is repudiated. Great parts of the world have cast off their allegiance. But in the long run Christ is to prevail. The world is to come back to His allegiance. All opposition to Him is to disappear. Every hostile power is to be abolished. Men who have cried, "We will not have this Man to reign over us," are joyfully to crown Him Lord of all. Buddha and Confucius and Mohamed are all to give place to Him. He is appointed "heir of all things." What a tonic

and bracing word this is—speaking as it does of glorious and absolute triumph! Here is no drawn battle! Here is no peace by negotiation! Here is no partition of the world and the abandonment of parts of it to other claimants! Jesus stands out creation's sole, supreme, and absolute Lord. In the Divine purpose (that purpose is never defeated or frustrated) He is appointed "*heir of all things.*" It is a bracing word for such a day as ours. The Christian Church at the moment is not enjoying the exhilaration of triumph and advance. She doesn't even seem to be holding her own. We hear of diminishing congregations, we see the growing neglect of the Sabbath, we are dismayed by the wide spread of a materialistic and frivolous temper. We are at the moment in an eddy, a sort of backwash! We seem to be losing ground rather than gaining it. I don't want to shut my eyes to any one of these menacing signs of the present religious situation; but the fact that things at the moment are not going our way is no reason for depression, much less for despair. Think of the condition of things when these words of my text were written. The Christians were a mere handful of humble, undistinguished people. Everything was against them. They had to wrestle against principalities and powers. They were confronted

not only by an unbelieving, but by a bitterly hostile, world. And yet they never doubted about the issue. They faced that hostile world, that wicked world, with a high and noble courage—with a confidence born of the certainty of triumph. They knew that world was bound to become Christ's world, for God had appointed Him heir of all things.

And we may face the present distress with the same high courage. In spite of the eddy, there is no doubt about the direction of the stream. In spite of the fact that evil men seem to wax worse and worse, this world is not the Devil's world. It is Christ's world—promised to Him, purchased by Him. Despair of the world, really and at bottom, is despair of God. And perhaps we need to be reminded, as Douglas was by that old negro woman when news of a bad defeat of the Northern Army reached him, and he burst into tears as if the cause of freedom were lost, "Frederick Douglas," said the brave old soul, "God is not dead." We need to have that said to us to shame and shake us out of our depressions and fears: "God is not dead." Our cause is not lost. Its ultimate triumph is certain. What the present condition of things ought to do for us is to challenge us to more faithful service, more holy living, more unashamed witnessing. But there ought to be

no timidities or despairs. God has not changed His mind and He has not abdicated His functions. Christ is to reign. It is God's settled purpose. He has appointed Him "heir of all things." All things! I am almost staggered by those words! It is so sweeping! So uncompromising! It makes no reservations and exceptions. It is inclusive, all-embracing. "All things!" It is on a line with that tremendous word of St. Paul's in which he says that "in the name of Jesus every knee shall bow—of things in Heaven and things in earth and things under the earth." Not a region in all the vast universe outside Christ's sway! Not a creature anywhere that does not acknowledge His rule, "Things under the earth!" I am not sure that a word like this does not compel us to revise some of our ideas and cherish bigger thoughts about the purposes of God than has been our wont. Doesn't a word like this constrain us to think of our broken universe as completely restored? Will God be satisfied that any of His creatures shall be ultimately and irretrievably lost? Will our Lord be content with a "few" saved? He died for the world; will He be satisfied with less than the world? "All things!" Oh, there is no doubt about the reality of judgment and punishment; but perhaps those fires of which the old

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Book speaks may be not simply the fires of penalty—they may be cleansing fires. Perhaps in them, as Browning says, “God unmakes but to remake the soul.” No; I do not dogmatise. There are considerations which prevent all but the foolish from doing that. But in the Valley of Achor it does seem to open a door of hope. “All things.” It conjures up before our wondering eyes the vision of a universe totally and completely redeemed!

Anyhow, the victory of Christ is sure! He is to inherit all things! He is to reign from the river to the ends of the earth. Let us take heart of grace even in dull days like these. Christ is creation’s Lord, and His Kingdom shall come. Let us greet it even now, though it be from afar, and resolve that we will share in the toil and travail that are to make that Kingdom come.

SACRIFICE AND EMPIRE

1 KINGS xvi. 34.—“ In his days did Hiel the Beth-elite build Jericho : he laid the foundation thereof with the loss of Abiram his firstborn, and set up the gates thereof with the loss of his youngest son Segub.”

OF course, what the sacred writer implies is that the loss of Abiram his firstborn and of Segub his youngest son was a punishment inflicted upon Hiel the Beth-elite for his sacrilegious daring in venturing to rebuild Jericho. What business had he to rebuild a city which Joshua, Israel's great leader and soldier, had laid under a solemn and dreadful curse? For that was exactly what Joshua had done. He had not only razed the city to the ground and destroyed all its inhabitants (with the exception of Rahab and her relations), but, after the work of destruction had been completed, he had charged the people with an oath, saying, “ Cursed be the man before the Lord that riseth up and buildeth this city Jericho : with the loss of his firstborn shall he lay the foundation thereof, and with the loss of his youngest son shall he set up the gates thereof.”

I suppose what led Joshua to treat Jericho

so savagely, and to forbid its rebuilding, was the fact that it had stubbornly resisted the entrance of the children of Israel into Canaan. It was the frontier city, and it resolutely barred the way against the invading hosts. To the Hebrews this amounted to a defiance of Almighty God. For had not God promised Canaan to them? Was not the land theirs by Divine right? The action of the people of Jericho in seeking to thwart their advance did not represent itself to them as the action of a brave people defending their hearths and homes ; it was the action of a wicked and blinded people defying Almighty God. Hence the curse which Joshua pronounced upon any one who should undertake to rebuild the doomed and ruined city.

But the plain of Jericho was an exceedingly fertile plain. The mountains enclosed it and a river bisected it. It was especially rich in palm trees and balsam trees. Nature revealed herself in her most lavish and generous mood in that plain of Jericho, so that Josephus could declare in his enthusiasm that the place might well be called divine and challenged comparison with any other climate in the whole earth. I can well believe that many an Israelite cast longing and almost covetous eyes upon the plain of Jericho, but the fear of Joshua's curse prevented them from attempting to rebuild.

But in Ahab's reign a man who was bolder than the rest, by name Hiel the Beth-elite, determined he would take the risk. It may have been that Hiel, under the influence of the example set by Ahab and Jezebel, had apostatised from Jehovah. It may be that he laughed at the curse as a bit of superstition. It may be that he thought that, now Israel was given over to the worship of Baal, Jehovah's writ no longer ran. Anyhow, Hiel made the venture. But it was a tragic venture for him, for Joshua's word came true—he laid the foundation of the new city with the loss of Abiram his firstborn, and set up the gates with the loss of his youngest son Segub. And I repeat again what I said in my first sentence, that I have no doubt at all that in the deaths of Abiram and Segub the sacred writer intends us to see the penalty that fell upon Hiel for his presumption.

But, as I read the old story, it was not the lesson of the sure and inevitable punishment of disobedience that it taught me—I saw in it a parable of the cost and sacrifices by which States are made and Empires are built up. Jericho in later days became a flourishing city. In Old Testament times, within, indeed, a few years of its rebuilding, it became the seat of what we should now call a theological college.

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In New Testament times it was one of the wealthiest and most prosperous cities in Palestine. But Jericho had cost a great price. The foundation thereof was laid "with the loss of Abiram, Hiel's firstborn, and the gates of it were set up with the loss of his youngest son Segub." But it is not Jericho alone that has been thus built and established. This is how all States and Empires have been built—by the sacrifices of men, by lives laid down. That is how States and Empires are maintained—by sacrifice. It is not the first and earliest sons alone who have to give life away; a like sacrifice is demanded of the youngest and latest born. That is to say, sacrifice is not only costly; it is continuous. Of States and Empires, as of Churches and individuals, it is true—they save life only by losing it.

I have turned to this particular incident because I want to speak about Empire, and especially that Empire to which we belong. For there is a wrong as there is a right way of thinking about Empire. There is a certain way of thinking and speaking about Empire which issues in the "frantic boast and foolish word." The thought of this vast Empire—its size, its strength, its material resources—generates in some people a foolish and, indeed, dangerous arrogance and pride. It results in

a display of vulgar and provocative flag-waving. Now let me quite frankly say that I am not averse to teaching our children to honour the flag. I have little or no patience with those people who seem to respect every flag except their own. The British flag is a flag to be proud of, not because of exploits done by soldiers who marched to battle beneath its folds or the victories and discoveries made by ships which floated that flag at their mast-heads, but because of the big and noble things for which it stands. The Cross makes the British flag. The Union Jack is just a combination of the Crosses of St. George, St. Andrew, and St. Patrick. I do not claim that in all that Britain has done it has been true to the spirit of the Cross which makes her flag. There are ugly pages in our Empire's history. But this I will say : I have seen that flag in many quarters of the world—in Egypt, in India, in the islands of the seas, in the great Dominions, and I know that wherever it floats it means justice and good government and personal freedom. When I say *that*, I speak that I do know, and testify that I have seen, and those great public virtues are not unworthy of the Cross which is their symbol. Why some of our British folk find pleasure in singing " The Red Flag " puzzles me. The sort of deeds done

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under the Red Flag inspire me with no kind of enthusiasm. But I take my hat off to the old flag, which for long years now has stood for freedom and fair play. I would have our young people honour it because it is the symbol of high and noble things.

Now, in speaking of Empire and our attitude towards it, it is fitting that something should be said about the size and extent of it—not for purposes of boasting, but to create a proper sense of responsibility. There never has been anything in the world like this British Empire of ours. Take a fact like this to begin with : nearly nine tenths of the whole habitable area of the globe are under the dominance of the white man, and the bulk of that, again, under white men who speak the English tongue. Think of this Empire of ours—embracing Australia (a continent in itself) and Canada (a country in itself as big as Europe) and New Zealand and South Africa. And in addition to these self-governing Dominions there is India (teeming and populous India) and the greater part of Africa and Palestine and the West Indies. It is quite true, as the poet says :

The Lord our God most High,
He hath made the deep as dry ;
He hath smote for us a pathway
To the ends of all the earth.

Or consider the Empire from the point of view of population. It is estimated—it can, of course, only be a rough estimate—that in the whole world there are about eighteen hundred million inhabitants. Of that number about four hundred and sixty millions, or about one fourth of the total population of our globe, are British subjects. And of those four hundred and sixty millions of our fellow citizens, six out of every seven are coloured. Three hundred and twenty millions of them live in India. They are of all religions ; they are in all stages of culture, from the primitive negroes of the Gold Coast, the half-savage or completely savage people of New Guinea, up to those clever, subtle Indians who can beat our best in our own Universities. It is not possible soldiers and sailors I see in these four hundred and sixty millions of people ; I see men and women for whose welfare, material, moral, and spiritual, we are responsible. We are, in the sight of God and man, their trustees. They are not to be exploited, but to be educated, moralised, Christianised. It is a great and solemn and almost overwhelming responsibility. But we belong to an Empire which is not only vast in its extent, and which imposes on us, who belong to it, great and solemn obligations, but we belong to an Empire which it cost a lot to create. It is a great heritage into which we have

been born—this heritage of the British name and the British citizenship. To be able to say *Civis Britannicus sum* is to be able to make a finer boast than the *Civis Romanus sum* of the ancient world. That citizenship is great, not simply because it marks us out as members of the most splendid Empire the world has ever known, but it is a sacred thing—a thing to be held in highest reverence, because this Empire of which it gives us the freedom has only been built with sacrifice and blood.

We value things in proportion to their cost. But we value nothing so highly as the things which have been purchased with the sacrifice of life. For what is money in comparison with life? You remember that great story about David and his three heroes? When David was a hunted outlaw, he had a whim one day that he would like a drink of water from the well at Bethlehem's gate—the old familiar well of whose waters he had drunk in his childhood's days. At the moment David felt there was no water in the world so cool and refreshing as the water of the well at Bethlehem's gate. It was just a passing whim, and probably, after giving expression to it, David thought no more about it. But to those three men David's lightest wish was law; and, though Bethlehem was at the time besieged by the Philistines, they determined

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David should have a drink of the water he longed for. So at night they ventured out—risking, of course, their lives in the process—stole through the Philistine lines, filled their vessel with the precious water, and then brought it to David. But when they gave it to their commander, do you think he could drink it? He knew at what price that water had been won. "Is not this," he said, "the blood of the men who went in jeopardy of their lives?" Water so dearly purchased was not to be used to satisfy a mere whim. As David saw it, it was no longer water at all; it was life blood. The sacrifice that had gone to the getting of it had made it a sacred and holy thing. God alone was worthy of so precious a gift, so David poured it out before the Lord.

Things bought at the risk of life are the most precious things of all. Sacrifice makes a possession sacred. Well, sacrifice, costly and immeasurable sacrifice, has gone to the making of this Empire of ours. We can say of it, "Is not this the blood of the men?" Any one who thinks lightly or talks lightly of this Empire of ours shows himself a profane person, for he is thinking and talking lightly of the sufferings and sacrifices of brave and devoted men. For of this Empire of ours it is literally true to say that the foundations of it were laid with the loss of our

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firstborn, and the gates thereof were set up with the loss of the youngest.

It is this truth, that sacrifice lies at the basis of our Empire, I want to illustrate in two or three directions.

PERSONAL PRIVILEGES

Consider the truth, to begin with, in the matter of *personal privilege*. I do not hesitate to say that the countries which make up the Empire are the freest countries under the sun. In no country does the individual enjoy fuller liberty and a larger measure of privilege than in these countries of ours. There are some people who seem to imagine that our freedom is fettered because we have a monarchy, and that we should be better off if we had a Republic. It is a pure delusion. Of course, the Soviet Republic of Russia is a pure tyranny, but not even under the Republic of France or the Republic of America is such liberty enjoyed as we possess. But, behind this personal freedom and political privilege in which we glory, there is a long, long story of conflict and struggle. The foundations of it were laid long ago in the struggle of Simon de Montfort and his barons with the King; it was built up by Cromwell and the men who

fought and bled in the Civil War. And the latest cost of it has been paid in these days of ours by those hundreds of thousands of lads—*your lads and ours*—the very flower of our youth who, on the fields of Flanders, in Gallipoli, in Mesopotamia, in Palestine, and on the high seas, jeopardised their lives to the death. For what? To keep Britain inviolate, to preserve our Empire's independence, to enable England to be England and Australia to be Australia and Canada to be Canada. They died to make our freedom secure. Anybody who treats our British freedom lightly is desecrating the graves of the men who died to win it. For the story of our British freedom is one long story of sacrifice. Its foundations were laid with the loss of our firstborn, and the gates of it were set up and maintained with the loss of our latest and youngest.

Or take, for further illustration, the matter of that religious liberty which we are at this moment enjoying. Of course you have been born into it, and, because you have been born into it, perhaps you fail to realise that this, too, has had its price. It is a precious and a sacred thing, to be valued and treasured, not only for what it is in itself, but also because of what it has cost. For this freedom of ours has been purchased by the labours of John Wyclif

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and the witness and the sufferings of the Lollards; by William Tyndale and Thomas Bilney and those others who purchased with their blood this open Bible; by the martyrdom of the Protestant confessors, Latimer and Ridley and Cranmer and Hooper; by the devotion of early Independents like Fitz and Copping and Thacker and Greenwood and Barrow and John Penry, who went to the gibbet in defence of liberty of conscience; by the sufferings of the two thousand who, on St. Bartholomew's day of 1662, gave up their livings and went out to face poverty and hardship in defence of the right of the soul to freedom in its worship of Almighty God; by those innumerable multitudes who suffered under Test Acts and Five Mile Acts and Conventicle Acts; and by that larger multitude still who have maintained their spiritual liberty in face of social pressure and disability. I say of this again, that any one who treats lightly the spiritual liberty which is ours is a profane person. For he is treating lightly something which has been won at vast and measureless cost. The story of our religious liberty is one long story of sacrifice, for the foundations of it were laid in the sufferings and deaths of the martyrs and confessors of long ago, and its gates are kept inviolate by the staunchness and loyalty of brave men in these days of ours.

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GEOGRAPHICAL EXTENT

Consider again the truth of this even as illustrated in the story of our *Empire's expansion*. Short-sighted and foolish men make that expansion a matter for wild boasting. But what I see, even in the geographical extent of our Empire, is not something which enables us to shake our fists in the faces of other nations and to swagger over them, but something to be regarded as a sacred heritage, because of the price at which it has been won. There are some people who pretend to believe that we have come by our Empire partly by piracy and partly by good luck. I am not going to say that every page of our history as an Empire is a clean page. But if the Empire had been simply the product of luck or piracy, it would have been shattered to pieces by the storm that broke upon it in 1914. The truth is that those who talk about piracy and good luck are simply closing their eyes to the plain and obvious facts. This Empire has been built up by sacrifice. You remember what Kipling says about Britain's command of the seas :

If blood be the price of admiralty,
Lord God, we ha' paid it in.

But blood has not simply been the price of

admiralty—that has been the price we have paid for every land which owns the British allegiance. You cannot mention a single part of the Empire for which we have not paid with life. We hadn't to fight for the great continent of Australia. Nevertheless, we have paid for it with life. Near the House of Parliament in Melbourne there is a statue of Burke. We paid for it with Burke's life. One of the pictures which struck me most when I was in Australia was a picture in two panels. It was the picture of a pioneer at two stages in his career. In the one you see the little shack in the bush where he and his wife lived, seeking to wring a livelihood from Nature's hand, waging a daily fight for bare existence. In the second, the fight has been won, and the pioneer has become a prosperous man—but at what a cost ; for in a glade of the bush you see a grave, a grave dug with the man's own hands—the grave of his wife. There are in the bush many graves of that sort, the graves of men who were making Australia. And still the pioneer toils out back—toils and suffers and sometimes dies. That is how Australia has been made—the foundations of it have been laid with the loss of its firstborn, and the gates of it are being raised in our days by the sacrifices of its latest and youngest sons.

Think of India. In the old days we generally thought of India as a country to which British people went to make money and then came home again to retire on the money thus earned. There may have been Britishers of that sort. But do you think we should be in India to-day if all our people had been of that type? Our hold on India is due to this: that British men have made sacrifices for India. They have fought her cholera; they have slaved to keep her people alive in famine; they have striven to give India justice and education and good government. There have been men like Henry Lawrence and Henry Havelock in India. There have been men like William Carey and Dr. Duff in India. There are graves in India—the graves of British men who sacrificed themselves for its people. By these graves our Empire in India has been purchased. And if India, with all its clamour for Home Rule, wishes only for Home Rule within the Empire, it is because its people have been won by what we have done and suffered and sacrificed on their behalf.

Think of Africa. If ever our Empire's foundations were laid in life and sacrifice, those of our African Empire were so laid. The real founder of British Africa was David Livingstone. He lived for Africa. He died for Africa. When he breathed his last at Ilala, he became the

first of a great army of martyrs. The first, but by no means the last. Africa is strewn with white men's graves. Tanganyika is ours now. But our real claim to it rests, not on the Treaty of Versailles, but on a fact like this: that round about that lake there are the graves of a dozen of our L. M. S. missionaries who died out there in their sacrificial desire to help the African. And the sacrifice still goes on. My church in Bournemouth has had its share in it. One of the best and bravest of the lads of my church lies in Bournemouth Cemetery; but he died for Northern Rhodesia, for he hadn't been a week at home before black-water fever claimed him. My own lad has found a Gold Coast grave. It is at a cost like this and by sacrifices like these we have made an Empire in Africa. The foundations of it have been laid with the loss of our firstborn, and the gates of it have been set up with the loss of our youngest.

An Empire thus purchased is a high and sacred trust. We have to see to it that it is maintained as an Empire worthy of the sacrifices thus made on its behalf. You remember, perhaps, that poem which a Canadian officer wrote, in which, speaking of the men who were laying down their lives for the Empire, he charged those of us who remain to be faithful to the ideals for which they died, and

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finished with the warning that, if we betrayed those ideals,

We shall not sleep, though poppies wave
O'er Flanders fields.

And a similar call comes to us from those British folk who drove the road and bridged the ford, who pioneered their way into the untrodden spaces, and who now lie sleeping beneath alien skies—they call to us to make this Empire worthy of the sacrifices they made on its behalf. We dishonour the dead unless we make the British name stand for the highest and noblest things. This Empire of ours is a sacred thing because of the cost at which it has been established, for is it not the blood of the men? Its foundations have been laid with the loss of our firstborn, and its gates set up with the loss of our youngest.

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And for a final word I want to add this : that as the Empire has been made by sacrifice, so by sacrifice it is going to be preserved. We are never going to keep it by the sword. Our one attempt so to do was disastrous, and ended in disruption and the secession from us of our great American colonies. I wonder sometimes

what the history of the world would have been if that tragedy had never taken place and the United States had remained in the British Commonwealth of Nations. Could we not together have secured the peace of the world? Any encouragement of the Jingoistic or militaristic spirit is perilous to the safety of the Empire of which it boasts. It is not by military prowess we are going to keep our Empire, but by sacrificial service. Let us live to serve and help those great territories which God has entrusted to our keeping, and we shall bind them to us by hoops of steel. We must get new ideas of Empire building and what it means. I am not for withholding my meed of praise from men like Lord Lawrence and Viscount Canning in India, Lord Durham in Canada, Sir George Grey in New Zealand, Sir William Macgregor in New Guinea, and Sir Henry Campbell-Bannerman in South Africa. But along with them, and perhaps superior to them, though their work is not blazoned abroad or their names known to public fame, I would put the names of doctors and missionaries who sacrifice themselves for the good of the people. I am thinking of men like our own Mr. McDermott of Newfoundland and Dr. Grenfell of Labrador. I am thinking of the men who work those great institutions of Lovedale and

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Tiger Kloof in Africa—men like Dr. Stuart and Mr. Willoughby. I am thinking of men like Dr. Pennell, who did so mighty a work amongst the Pathans of Northern India, and Dr. Laws, who accomplished such great things in Nyassaland. Here are men who, without a thought of self, just give themselves to the service of the people amongst whom they sojourn and make the very name of Britain fragrant and beloved. It is by this way of sacrificial service we shall keep our Empire—not by force ; force has never yet maintained an Empire ; not by regarding those territories and peoples committed to our charge as so many opportunities for exploitation, but by service and sacrifice. It may be that in the course of the years the constituent parts of our Empire will claim a larger freedom—it is natural that children as they grow up should ask for greater independence—but they will never leave an Empire that seeks to serve and help them.

That is the ideal of Empire I would have our young folk cherish. I want them to be proud of the Empire, for it is a great and precious thing, and it stands in the world for high and exalted ideals. I want Britain to be potent amongst the nations just because she stands for some of the best and finest things. But remember the Empire can only be maintained

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by sacrifice—by such sacrifice of ourselves as is entailed in living cleanly and honourably. You can never keep an Empire going if its people are frivolous and flippant and corrupt. Our flesh and sense must be denied. We must live pure and speak true and follow the Christ. But it is not simply that personal self-denial that is asked for ; but we must sacrifice ourselves to minister to the good of those who, with ourselves, make up this Empire. We keep our life only by giving it away. The foundations of the Empire have been laid with the sacrifice of the firstborn ; its gates are only going to be set up by the sacrifice of the youngest. God gave us so much of the world in fee in order that we might share our blessings with them, and especially our blessings in the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Shall we give ourselves to that task ? Have you ever made any sacrifices for India or Africa ? Have you ever done anything to make the peoples of those lands feel glad that they belong to us ? I catch myself wishing that our youths and maidens would volunteer to go out as missionaries and doctors to India and Africa. Those who do so are builders of Empire as well as of the Kingdom of God. But even if we cannot go, we can keep that ideal of Empire steadily before us, an Empire based on service and sacrifice. It is not the firstborn

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only who have to make sacrifices—we, the latest born, have to make our sacrifices too. Our banner is a banner with a Cross in it. Let us not make a mockery of our symbol by selfish living! That is what is going to make and keep Britain great—

Still stands thine ancient sacrifice
An humble and a contrite heart.

THE UNITY OF GOD AND THE UNITY OF THE RACE¹

EPHESIANS iv. 6.—“One God and Father of all.”

IT is about the Church—the great Church, the total Church—that the Apostle is here speaking. That great Church had its local manifestations, for already Christianity had gained a footing in places as far apart as Jerusalem, Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, and Rome. In all these places Christian churches—local fellowships—had been formed. These local churches differed amongst themselves in method and practice and polity. There were, as the Apostle himself says elsewhere, diversities of administrations and operations. But, in spite of all these external differences, all these local fellowships together formed one “body,” and knew themselves to be one great Church, because, whether in Antioch, Ephesus, Corinth, Rome, or Jerusalem, they had one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all.

It is, therefore, quite clear that it is of God’s relationship to the Christian people that the

¹Preached at St. Peter’s Cathedral, Geneva, September 11, 1927, on the occasion of the meeting of the Assembly of the League of Nations.

words of my text were originally written. All Christian people are one because they have one God and Father. But while God is Father to believing people in a special and intimate way, He is also the Father of all mankind. Our Lord speaks of God as Father in that inclusive and universal sense. In that great collection of His sayings which we call the Sermon on the Mount that is quite obviously the meaning He attaches to God's Fatherhood, for He speaks of Him as One who in the fullness and freeness of His love makes His sun to rise and His rain to fall on the evil and the good, on the just and the unjust. The fact that God is Father to the believing people in a special and intimate way in nowise challenges or contradicts the truth of His universal Fatherhood. In the case of the Christian the filial relationship to God is a *realised* relationship ; in the case of non-believing people it is an *unrealised* relationship. As our great Dr. Dale used to put it : " God is the Father of all men, but all men are not sons." But the fact that a relationship is not realised does not affect the fact that such a relationship exists. The universal Fatherhood of God is a New Testament truth. So that, while I may be departing slightly from the original application of the phrase of my text, I shall certainly not be travelling beyond the orbit of Christian

truth, if I use it as descriptive of God's relationship to the whole of mankind, and find the ultimate ground for belief in the unity of the race, and justification for our faith that the race will one day realise itself as "one body" in the great fact that there is "one God and Father of us all."

I

I wonder if it is extravagant to say that the greatest discovery ever made by the mind of man—or perhaps I ought to say the greatest revelation ever made to the mind of man—was the revelation that God was One! I am not forgetting that other epoch-making, revolutionising discoveries have been made in the course of the centuries—discoveries which have profoundly affected both thought and life: discoveries like Copernicus' discovery that our earth went round the sun; Sir Isaac Newton's discovery of the law of gravitation; Lyell's discovery of the story of the rocks, with its consequent recasting and immense enlargement of the history of our globe; Darwin's discovery of the law of evolution. But, vast though the influence of these discoveries has been, I will venture to assert that the discovery that God was One has been—so far as thought and life are concerned—more influential far.

Not the discovery of God, but the discovery that God was One ! God did not need to be discovered. The belief in God, the sense of God, is intuitive, instinctive, universal. Man has never to argue himself into belief in the existence of God ; he has only to argue himself into a *denial* of His existence. And, with all his arguing, he does not succeed particularly well. Belief in God is natural—almost inevitable. For, as soon as he wakes to conscious life, man finds himself in the presence of things, events, happenings which make him feel that there is outside of himself some mighty Other, some Power vastly stronger and greater than himself. His conceptions of this Power not himself may, and do, vary vastly in dignity and purity. But the worship by the savage of his fetish is as valid a witness to the reality of the instinct for God as our Christian worship in this Cathedral this morning. The Bible advances no proof for the *existence* of God. It assumes it. It takes it for granted. The instinct for God is one of the aboriginal instincts of the human soul.

But it is one thing to be sure that there is a God ; it is another and a different thing to know what God is like. There has been a long history of the race's apprehension of the nature of God. Behind our present-day knowledge of God there lie ages of searching and striving,

of guessing and blind groping after God. If we live to-day in the broad light of noon, before us there were men who lived in the morning twilight and the dim dawn, and others who lived in a night only illumined by the faint glimmer of the stars. The race's knowledge of God has grown from more to more, and every fresh discovery of God's nature has meant moral and spiritual uplift for the world—for a race's standards and ideals are ultimately determined by the nature of the God it worships.

In the beginning of things, men believed in a multitude of gods. Each clan, each tribe, each city had its own special deity. These gods were like petty princelings, for their power was limited to their own clan or tribe or city, and beyond such clan or tribe or city their writ did not run. The ancient Greeks, for example, peopled the world with gods. They gave every tree and river and spring its deity. They pictured the greater gods as dwelling in Olympus, and, although Zeus was considered to be in some fashion king of the gods, yet each god had his own special and peculiar sphere of influence, and each went his own sweet way. In Greek story, gods and goddesses are represented as intervening in the affairs of men. They take sides in human quarrels. In the Homeric hymns, for example, Hera and Pallas

Athene are represented as using their power on the side of the Greeks, and Aphrodite as using hers on the side of the Trojans. Now, it needs no pointing out that so long as people believed in gods many, gods oftentimes at variance amongst themselves, there could be no real belief in plan or purpose in the life of the world. A Pantheon is inconsistent with any real faith in Providence. Polytheism gives men not a cosmos, but a chaos.

Even amongst the Jews, who in the matter of religion have been the supreme teachers of our race, the idea that God was One and that He was the God of the whole earth took long years in coming to birth. The Jews were henotheists long before they were monotheists. That is to say, they limited their worship to one God—Jehovah—long before they realised that Jehovah was the only God. At first Jehovah was just the Hebrew God, a local and tribal deity whose sphere of influence was limited to the tribe that worshipped Him. He was the Hebrew God in exactly the same way as Baal was the god of the Phœnicians, and Milcom the god of the Ammonites, and Bel and Nebo the gods of the Babylonians. When Jacob fled for his life he thought he was leaving his father's God behind. He was taken wholly

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by surprise when he found that God was still near him though he had wandered far from his father's tents. "Surely," he said, when he awoke out of his sleep, "the Lord was in this place and I knew it not." The popular idea of God as being local and limited is illustrated in the excuse the servants of Benhadad, the Syrian King, advanced for the defeat of his troops at the hands of the people of Northern Israel. "Their gods," they said, "are gods of the hills, therefore they were stronger than we; but let us fight them in the plain and surely we shall be stronger than they." And that the idea of local and limited gods was not confined to what we call pagan peoples, but was shared by the Hebrews themselves, is proved by what King Ahaz did after his defeat by the King of Syria. He sacrificed unto the gods of Damascus which smote him, and said, "Because the gods of the Syrians help them, therefore will I sacrifice to them, that they may help me." While the Hebrews regarded Jehovah as their own special God, and gave some sort of obedience to the command, "Thou shalt have no other gods before me," that did not prevent them from thinking that there were many other gods beside Jehovah, and that these other gods had authority and power amongst other peoples.

It was a tremendous day when it flashed

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upon the mind of the seer that Jehovah was the God of the whole earth—not only of Canaan, but of the world—and that all the gods of the nations were idols, mere blocks of wood and stone, dead and inert things, mere nothings, possessed of no power or authority, possessed, indeed, of no real existence. “I am the Lord” is the mighty declaration made through the lips of the prophets, “and there is none else: there is no god beside Me.” The prophet brushes aside the mob of deities wherewith other nations peopled the earth—brushed them aside with a certain intellectual scorn—they were nothing, he said, but the work of the smith and the carpenter—and claims the whole place for God. “I am God and there is none else.”

II

Now I venture to repeat the statement that this revelation that God was One, and that He was the Only, was one of the most tremendous truths ever flashed into the mind of man. It has profoundly affected thought and practical life. It has had certain great and momentous consequences.

(a) To begin with, it has given us a universe, a cosmos, a rational and intelligible world.

There could be no *universe* so long as the world was supposed to be under the sway of a number of conflicting and competing deities. If various gods were at work in this world of ours, prosecuting their own plans and furthering their own purposes, we should have a confused, incalculable, chaotic world. That accounts for the sigh of relief with which—according to Dr. Glover—an educated Japanese welcomed the proclamation of the Christian Gospel. “One God,” he exclaimed, “not eight millions ; that was joyful news to me.” One of the regulative ideas of our time is that of the uniformity of Nature. There is nothing accidental or haphazard or casual about Nature—Nature can be depended on. Astronomers, for example, can forecast to the minute the coming of an eclipse. But what is the uniformity of Nature but the scientific aspect of the unity of God? We have a reasonable world, a world which we can decipher and understand, a universe and not a chaos, because behind all Nature’s phenomena there is a Mind, a single Mind ; because God, one God, works all and in all. You remember how Tennyson expresses it :

One God, one law, one element,
And one far off Divine event
To which the whole creation moves.

But it all starts with the "one God." "One law" because there is "one God."

(b) And as it makes our world a universe, so it justifies us in believing there is meaning and purpose in life—the life both of the individual and of the world. To believe in a multitude of gods, playing at cross-purposes, using men and women as pawns in their game, is to reduce life to a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing. It is to make life the sport and plaything of caprice. We are able to believe that things work together for good only because we believe there is one God at work, and He a good and loving God. And we are able to believe that, in spite of delays and set-backs and reactions, there is some "far-off Divine event to which the whole creation moves" only because we believe in one God, one Sovereign Lord steadily bringing to pass His own chosen and determined purpose.

(c) And, thirdly—this is the point I wish specially to emphasise—the unity of God carries with it the unity of the race. If there were a multitude of gods, each dowered with creative power, we could not assert the unity of the race. In the ancient world we do actually find some nations claiming a different origin from others in order to assert their superiority over them. But there is one God. It is He that hath made us and

not we ourselves. One God ! and we are all His creation. I do not know how far the poet Aratus, whom Paul quoted on Mar's Hill, would have extended the application of this sentence : " We also are His offspring." But I know how far the Apostle himself would have extended it. He would have extended it to the whole race. He would have said that it was true of every human being beneath the sun. " God," he declared, " made of one every nation of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth." Humanity is one wherever you find it. It is one in spite of differences of colour and physiognomy and speech. It is one in spite of the vast differences in development which separate the child races of Africa and the South Seas from the finished product of Western civilisation—one because created by the same God, with fundamentally the same feelings and instincts and aspirations. " We are His offspring ! " All men can make that great and stupendous statement. All men can lay claim to that august and heavenly origin. Yellow man, brown man, black man, white man—it is He that hath made us and not we ourselves. We are His people and the sheep of His pasture. The unity of God is the ultimate ground of, and justification for, our faith in the essential unity of the human race.

III

Our Lord, in His teaching about God, built upon the foundations laid by the prophets. He started from this great truth—the climax of the prophetic revelation: that God was One and that He was good and holy—but He added another truth to it, a truth about the *nature* of God, a truth which has transfigured our very conception of God, and given us a God whom we can not only fear and reverence, but love. You find the addition in the sentence of my text. “One God,” that is the culminating revelation of the Old Testament. “And Father,” that is the addition Jesus made. St. Paul could never have penned the brief sentence of my text, had he not sat at the feet of Christ and learned of Him. “One God and *Father* !”

This word “Father” describes what God is essentially and in Himself. He was always the Father because He always had a Son. But it also describes the relationship in which He stands to our race. He is our God, but our God is also our Father—a Father of measureless love and compassion—a Father who, in the passion of His redeeming love, gave His Son to die. And he is such a Father to all men everywhere. “One God and Father of all !”

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I said a moment ago that the fact that God was One carries with it the truth of the unity of the race. But this further truth, which our Lord revealed—the truth that God is also our Father—makes of our race something warmer and more intimate than a unity ; it makes it a *family*. No matter where men live, no matter what tongue they speak, no matter what allegiance they own, no matter what the stage of their development, they make up one household, they form one great family, because there is “ one God and Father of all.”

Now, the Fatherhood of God has become an accepted truth, at any rate amongst Christian nations. But the consequential truth of the unity of the race, of the real brotherhood of men, still waits for a practical acceptance. While saying this, I am not forgetting that there has taken place in the course of the centuries a great enlargement in men's sense of relationship to one another. At first, I suppose, the sense of kinship was limited to the family group, then from the family group it extended to the clan, and from the clan to the tribe, and from the tribe to the nation. We are a long way in advance of the old days when “ stranger ” and “ enemy ” were convertible terms, and when the foreigner was *ipso facto* a foe. But there is one extension of our sense of relationship

which remains still to be made, and until it is made there can be no real quietness for our disturbed and restless world. We need to realise that the whole human race is a family, and that, though we may live at opposite ends of the earth, we are still members one of another.

At present, our sense of relationship is, in practice, limited to the nation. We are acutely conscious of nationhood. We stress the things which separate us from other nationals—tradition, custom, culture, language. We emphasise our distinctness and our national individuality. President Wilson's phrase about the self-determination of peoples expresses what most of us, probably, would regard as a just and, indeed, inevitable political principle. But its immediate effect has been to make nations emphasise the things in which they differ; it has *not* helped them to realise that the whole race is one family. Now—to avoid misunderstanding—let me say that I have no word to speak by way of disparagement of nationalism. The love of one's land is an instinctive passion with us all. That land need not be outwardly fair and splendid. It need not be adorned with the magnificence of lake and mountain, as is this land wherein we meet. The land, to the stranger, may appear dull, uninteresting, squalid, and yet to it the hearts of its children

turn with fond and unutterable longing. Every country, to those who are born in it, is God's own country. To the soldier on service, in those dreadful days of war, to return home for a few days furlough was the height of bliss. "Home" might be some remote country village, some grimy mining-town, some mean street in one of our great industrial centres, with nothing in it to attract the passing stranger, and yet to it the soldier sped as on the wings of the wind—it was "home." It is a beautiful, pathetic, sacred thing—this love of a man for his native land. "Patriotism" we call it, and under the impulse of patriotic passion some of the noblest deeds in history have been performed. So, I repeat, I have no word to say by way of disparagement of national patriotism. There is something abnormal, almost inhuman, about the man who never says to himself, with a kind of thrill at the heart, "this is my own, my native land."

Nationalism is a good thing so long as we remember that it is not the final word. It is right to love our nation—so long as we remember that there is a world outside the nation, and that all the nations in that world are embraced in the larger unity of the race. But, while the right kind of nationalism is a good and admirable thing, it is idle to pretend that there is no danger to the world in the fervid

nationalism of these days. It menaces the world's peace. With its emphasis on national interests, national prestige, national honour, it breeds envy, jealousy, suspicion, hatred. It begets friction and strife. That is what we are suffering from just now—what Lord Hugh Cecil called “an exaggerated nationalism.” For nationalism—while right and good in itself—unless it is modified by the larger patriotism of the race, may easily become a dangerous and deadly thing. “*Corruptio optimi pessima.*” The truth that needs to be brought home to the minds and consciences of men just now is the truth that the race is a unity—the whole of mankind is one great household. We are all of the same family. Englishmen, Frenchmen, Germans, Swiss—whatever we be—we are brothers together, for there is one God and Father of all. Our several nationalisms are reconciled, and find their unity in this larger internationalism. And, unless our national patriotisms are modified by this sense of race relationship, our nationalisms may be the torch to set the world on fire.

It is for that larger, wider, nobler patriotism the League of Nations stands. The primary object of the League is to prevent war—to substitute, for the brutish and barbarous methods of warfare, methods of reason and persuasion and

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conciliation. For the simple truth is that war settles nothing, but in its process it destroys much. It isn't simply that it destroys wealth and burdens the generations with a mountain-load of debt. It isn't simply that it takes a vast and heart-breaking toll of human life. It destroys things more precious even than wealth and life. It disintegrates our moral standards ; it lowers the moral tone ; it drags our ideals into the dust ; it makes a mock of our Christian faith. Statesmen have repeatedly warned us that any " next war " might mean the total ruin of our civilisation. So it might be—and in a deeper and more dreadful sense than our statesmen sometimes think. This League of Nations deserves the eager and prayerful support of all Christian people, because it aims to prevent a recurrence of war. It has already accomplished much, and has thereby placed the world in its debt. It has stamped out local outbreaks which might—had they not been promptly dealt with—have become devastating conflagrations.

We hailed the establishment of the League as the dawning of a better day. But the fair dawn has ushered in a cloudy and unsettled day. The world is still a haunted and fear-ridden world. The truth is, the League of Nations, in and of itself, is insufficient to guarantee the world's peace. Behind the League, if it is to be

effective, there must be a mind, a public mind, and it must be a new mind—a mind that thinks not in terms of nations, but of the world. Wasn't it Monsieur Briand who said that before disarmament could become a practical policy there would have to be a "disarmament of the mind." That is true! But we need something more radical even than a disarmament of the mind, we want the creation of a *new* mind. Men act as they think. If they think in terms of nations—in terms of a nation's interests and supposed prestige—they will act as nations, and that is certain to mean antagonism and strife. Not until they think in terms of the race will the peace of the world be secure. Our Lord was always insisting upon the new mind, or the "new heart" as He expressed it. Out of the heart, He said, evil thoughts proceed. The evil heart was the bitter fountain of sin and wrong. Nothing but a change of heart would avail to cure the ills from which the individual and the race were suffering. And no cure less radical and deep than that will avail to deliver us from the blight of war—a new mind, a new heart.

And how shall men get this "new mind," this "new heart"? Well, the regular meeting of the representatives of the various nations in the Assembly of the League is doing something to create it. But, in the long run, it is only Jesus

Christ who can really give it. As men learn of Him, receive His Spirit, they get new outlooks, new ideals, new motives, new inspirations. They are literally "born again." They are renewed in the very spirit of their minds. And, amongst other things, they get His mind about the relationship of men to God and their relationship to one another. That is what Christ does when He is truly received—He gives men the new mind, He abolishes the enmities, and teaches men to love one another. This is not mere theorising. History affirms the truth of it. There was no fiercer or more vehement nationalist than the Apostle Paul was in his early days. He was a Hebrew of Hebrews. But, when Christ was born in him, he got a new mind. All his Jewish prejudices died, and he took the world to his heart. No gulf could have been deeper than that which yawned between Jew and Gentile. But, when Christ was received into the heart, that great chasm was bridged, "the middle wall of partition" was broken down, their ancient animosity was buried, and they turned to one another and clasped hands, and said: "Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another." And not to go back to ancient history, but to speak of something within one's own experience—I have been at a meeting of men of all nationalities and colours and tongues, and we had

forgotten all about the differences that divided us as we sang, "Blest be the tie that binds our hearts in Christian love," and realised we were brothers together because sons of the one Father and redeemed by the one Saviour.

There lies the real hope of the world—in this "new mind" which Jesus gives. We say that war between us and the United States is "unthinkable." Why? Because we have a sense of relationship with the people of that great republic. We are allied to them by language, by common ideals, and, in part, by blood. What Jesus does is to create within us a new sense of relationship with men everywhere. He speaks to us of one God and Father of *all*. He makes brotherhood a blessed fact. When once Jesus is generally received, war anywhere, with anybody, will become "unthinkable." "War is suicide," said Dr. Fosdick last year. Yes; but in the light of our Lord's teaching it is something more and something worse—it is fratricide.

So in our redeeming, regenerating Lord lies the world's real hope. It is either Christ or chaos. I do not know that Treaties and Alliances are an effective safeguard against war. I do not know that thoughts of the cost of war, the terror of it, the sheer futility of it, will prevent nations from plunging into it. But a "new mind" will do it, the mind which was in Christ Jesus, a new sense

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of relationship to one another born out of a sense of common relationship to God. So that is our task—to preach Christ, to preach Him with conviction and with passion! Once men receive Him, the nightmare of war and the fear of it will pass for ever, and there shall be abundance of peace till the moon be no more. I finish with the narration of an incident which to me was more than an incident—it was a parable. I attended a great religious conference in Boston, U.S.A., many years ago. The platform of the hall in which we met was decorated with flags—the flags of the various nations represented in the conference. But in the middle were hung side by side, and interfolded, the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes. Above those two flags there was hung another flag—a small flag, which consisted of a Cross on a white ground. One day an American speaker explained to us strangers what that tiny flag with the Cross on it meant. It was the flag that floated at the mast-head of American war-ships during Divine Service. “It is the only flag,” he added, “that ever floats above the Stars and Stripes.” On that day it was floating above the Union Jack as well. The Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes were, so to speak, linked together by the flag with the Cross on it. But it is not the Union Jack and the Stars and Stripes alone which will float side by

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side, but the flags of all the nations will float in friendship and peace side by side when the flag with the Cross on it floats over them all. And that is the Church's business—to preach the Christ who died upon that Cross to reconcile men to God and to reconcile them to one another. Language divides, nationalism divides, political allegiance divides, trade interests divide—but Jesus Christ unites. In a common love to Him, men learn to love one another. His revelation of the one God and Father makes all men brethren. By preaching Christ, by spreading abroad His spirit, we are surely hastening the day when

. . . the whole round earth is every way
Bound by gold chains about the feet of God.

THE SIMPLICITY THAT WAS IN CHRIST

2 CORINTHIANS xi. 3.—“The simplicity that is in Christ.”

I HAVE quoted these words as they are given to us in the Authorised Version. But I think, as a mere matter of intellectual honesty, I ought to call attention to the fact that the Revised Version does not speak of the “simplicity that is *in* Christ,” but “the simplicity that is *toward* Christ.” I have absolutely no doubt that the Revised Version rendering is the right one. The context puts it beyond dispute. The Apostle is thinking, not so much of the simplicity which characterised Jesus, as the simplicity and singleness of the devotion which the Corinthians once showed *towards* Jesus. I think the Apostle would say that the essential thing in Christianity was a very simple thing. It was just the surrender of the soul to Jesus. The whole of Christianity for Paul centred in Christ and Him Crucified, and being a Christian meant trusting that crucified Lord. That was what Paul had preached in Corinth. He knew nothing amongst the Corinthians save Jesus Christ and Him as crucified, and under his

THE SIMPLICITY THAT WAS IN CHRIST preaching many of them had committed themselves in simple faith to the Redeeming Lord. But into the Corinthian Church there had come teachers who were stressing other things. It looks very much as if the Judaisers had come then. The Judaisers did not deny that the Gentiles who had put their faith in Jesus were Christians. What they said was that they were only a second-class kind of Christian, and if they wanted to become first-class Christians, perfect Christians, they would submit themselves to circumcision and would observe the obligations of the Mosaic law. And they must evidently have produced some effect, for in this verse of my text the Apostle expresses his fear lest, just as Eve was seduced from obedience to the plain and simple command of God by the blandishments of the serpent, so these Corinthian Christians should be led away by the arguments of their Judaising teachers, with their insistence on rites and ceremonies, from the simplicity that was toward Christ—from that simple trust in Christ which alone made a person a Christian. That clearly was the thought in the Apostle's mind, and I shall have something to say about it before I close. But I want to start by speaking of the simplicity that was in Jesus Himself. The two simplicities are, indeed, closely akin. The one **is** congruous with the other. Because

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simplicity was the characteristic of Christ Himself, you would expect simplicity also to characterise the faith He preached. So, before I say anything about the simplicity which is *toward* Christ, let me speak with you about the simplicity which is *in* Christ.

There is only one word which I need add by way of preliminary, and that is to remind you that simplicity is a great virtue and grace. I do not know that it is always regarded as such. There are certain words which, in the course of the centuries, have become degraded and debased. They are like coins which have lost weight ; or, rather, they are like coins which contain so much alloy that their value has depreciated. "Charity" is such a word. It used to mean *love*, the greatest thing on earth ; and that is the sense in which it is used in the Authorised Version rendering of that immortal thirteenth chapter of I Corinthians. But "charity" in our day has come to stand for the alms we fling a beggar, and so it has to be taken out of that great chapter—musical and beautiful word though it is—and the word *love* has had to be substituted for it. And this word *simple* has suffered a like fate. It really sets forth a great and beautiful quality, but as it is used nowadays men don't regard it as a compliment. When a thing is described as being "simple" there is

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Now we must disabuse our minds of all these ideas which our common use of the word *simple* tends to foster. Simplicity is not the equivalent of silliness; it is no sign of defective mental power. It is an element in all greatness of character. People have again and again noticed this quality of simplicity in some of the greatest of our race. D'Alembert says of Fénelon, the great French preacher and writer, that he was characterised by a great simplicity. One who knew Thomas Chalmers, the great Scottish preacher and leader, says of him that "in simplicity he was a child." It wasn't a simplicity of the head—for Thomas Chalmers was a giant in intellect—but a simplicity of disposition and spirit. I have been struck by exactly the same thing when reading the life

THE SIMPLICITY THAT WAS IN CHRIST of Abraham Lincoln. He had his part to play in world-shaking affairs, but in and through them all he was simple in speech, simple in action, simple in life. But in no one is the grace of simplicity more beautifully illustrated than in Jesus, and it is an element in the perfection of His character. Let us for a moment consider the simplicity that is in Christ.

I

(a) I begin with this : Jesus was simple in *His personal life*. Poverty and simplicity almost, perforce, go hand in hand. When money is scarce life is reduced to its barest elements. Well, there was no luxury in the home into which Jesus was born. The carpenter's house at Nazareth could boast of none of the adornments and garnishings of life. Everything was bare and simple and severe. And that was the home into which Jesus chose to come. It wasn't a palace Jesus chose for His home, where He would be surrounded with the pageantry of rank and the luxury of wealth, but a peasant's house where, of necessity, life would have to be lived in its very simplest terms. And the simplicity which marked the home at Nazareth characterised our Lord's life all through. I believe, if He had so wished it,

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He could have had all the luxuries that money could command, for He had friends who would have been delighted to put their all at His disposal. But Jesus loved the simplicities and observed them of His own free choice. The garment He wore was a seamless cloak of His mother's making ; He often spent the night under the wide and starry sky ; He was never burdened with money ; and as for food—although His friends would have delighted to banquet Him—Jesus desired nothing but such plain food as was needful to keep life going. When Martha was fussing about one day making an elaborate dinner for Him, Jesus said to her, “ Martha, Martha, thou art careful and troubled about many things ”—about many dishes for the table—“ but few only are needful, or even one.” Jesus had absolutely no taste for the luxuries, the pomps and vanities of life. He lived the simple life. And sometimes I feel that this simplicity of Jesus—careless of money, content with plainest food, without where to lay His head—is a great rebuke to us in these days. Life has become soft and indulgent for us. Plain living and high thinking are no more. And perhaps our increasing love of luxury has not a little to do with our social unrest. People want money to spend it on their pleasures. And the knowledge that so

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much money is wasted in wanton pleasure must embitter the minds and hearts of those who scarcely have enough to keep body and soul together. If we, all of us, imitated the simplicity that was in Christ, and lived more simply and plainly, we should have more to spare to meet the needs of others, and much might be done to allay social bitterness.

(b) I pass on now to notice the *simplicity of Christ's speech*. As Dr. George Morrison says, our Lord's sermons put our sermons and books to shame. Ours are involved and turgid and hard to be understood, and His were pellucid and crystal clear. The common people heard Him gladly, and that was because everything was so lucid and plain. They could understand Jesus. In a lecture on Robert Burns I recently listened to, the lecturer invited us to notice how one of Burns' most beautiful lyrics was written practically in monosyllables—in the very simplest words he could find. Well, is not that one reason why Burns has appealed so strongly to the universal heart? He uses the language of the people. His very simplicity is His strength. It was much like that with Jesus. Nothing could be plainer, simpler, more direct than His teaching. People who were mere "babes," so far as education went, could understand it. And that wasn't because the

THE SIMPLICITY THAT WAS IN CHRIST teaching of Jesus was shallow. It was teaching that sounded the great deeps. We have really rather stupid ideas about simplicity in preaching. The simple is not necessarily the shallow, and the difficult is not necessarily the deep. The muddy pond whose bottom you cannot see may be not six inches deep, while some pool, crystal clear, with every pebble at the bottom plainly to be seen, may go over a man's head. It is easy enough to reproduce the language of the class-room or the theological treatise, to use technical words, and preach a sermon which shall be clean over the heads of the hearers. The difficult thing to do—but the only thing worth doing—is to be able to simplify great themes until they become intelligible to the man who sits in the seat of the unlearned. That is exactly what Jesus did. He didn't ask for an "intellectual" congregation. He preached to the multitude, to the crowd, to the common people, in speech which they could understand, using stories and illustrations which they could remember. It was simple preaching. But it was deep preaching! It was tremendous preaching, nevertheless!

Have you noticed that some of our very simplest words stand for the very biggest things? *Life, love, soul, death, sin, God!* Take any one of those simple words, and it opens up great deeps

THE SIMPLICITY THAT WAS IN CHRIST for us where all our thoughts are drowned. They are at once the shortest and simplest, and the biggest and deepest words in human speech. And it was in those words Jesus dealt, and it was of those themes He spoke. It was simple speech, but it was the simplicity of the clear, deep pool. "He that saveth his life shall lose it; he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it." Nothing could be simpler than that sentence. The words are nearly all monosyllabic. Yet for nineteen centuries men have been trying to explore the depth of their meaning, and they haven't exhausted them yet. Long words, difficult words, are no evidences of profundity. They may cover up a great deal of foggy thought. If a man wants to be a "deep" preacher, let him imitate "the simplicity that is in Christ."

(c) Once again I see evidence of the simplicity of Christ in *His choice of associates* and such arrangements as He left for His people of succeeding generations. Take first His choice of associates: the simplicity of Christ comes out in the kind of men He called. If He had been intent upon making a great show, He would have tried to enlist as His Apostles some of the eminent Rabbis of Jerusalem, or honourable counsellors like Nicodemus and Joseph of Arimathea. Instead of that, He chose twelve

THE SIMPLICITY THAT WAS IN CHRIST men, eleven of whom were Galileans, one of whom had been a despised tax-gatherer, and six at least of whom had just been fishermen on the lake. They were plain men of the people. The character of the men He chose illustrates the simplicity that was in Christ. And the "call" He addressed to them illustrates it too. That was what He said to Peter and Andrew and James and John as He passed by on the lake side. "Follow Me": that was what He said to Levi at his tollbooth. "Follow Me." There was no enquiry as to their beliefs, there was no examination into their orthodoxy—simply that call: "Follow Me." And I can read of no ordination, no induction service, no laying on of hands. When they were summoned to be Apostles, what Jesus did was just to choose Twelve out of the larger number of His disciples that these Twelve might be with Him and that He might send them forth to preach. There was nothing ostentatious about the appointment of the Twelve. There was nothing striking or dramatic about it. All was just as simple and informal as could be.

And what is true of the choice and call of the Twelve is true of such arrangements as Jesus made for His people of succeeding generations. There are some scholars who say He made no arrangements at all—that He didn't even

THE SIMPLICITY THAT WAS IN CHRIST contemplate the establishment of a Church. I do not accept that view. I believe that when Jesus called the Twelve He meant them to be the nucleus of a Church. I have never yet been able to see why the authenticity of that passage in which Jesus says, "Upon this rock I will build My Church," should be challenged. I believe Jesus had His Church in His mind—for it was only by having a Church He could establish His Kingdom. Still, while I dissent from the view of those who hold that Jesus never thought of a Church, I agree with them to this extent—that Jesus was no ecclesiastic. There is no touch of ecclesiasticism in the Gospels. There is nothing in them about creeds and orders and Church politics. There is no suggestion of a Church constitution. Jesus simply thought of His Church as a fellowship of men and women who loved Him and believed He was the Son of God. Every other idea about the Church—ideas which controversy has made only too familiar to us—has been added since, and is an addition to the simplicity which was in Christ. I can only read of one definite arrangement which Jesus made for His Church, and that was one of the simplest conceivable things. He arranged a supper. The Quakers don't think that Jesus meant even that to be of perpetual obligation—they

THE SIMPLICITY THAT WAS IN CHRIST would say that Jesus left His people, without rules or instructions, to shape their life and practice under the guidance of the Indwelling Spirit. I think the Quakers are wrong there. But, at any rate, this was the only thing Jesus left—this Supper. And what a simple thing it was! And what simple things composed it—bread and wine—the two commonest and most familiar things that ever appeared on a table. He gave His disciples broken bread to eat and wine to drink, and said, “This do in remembrance of Me.” The bread and wine were already there—part of the Passover feast. All Jesus did was to give the old things a new meaning. “Eat the bread and drink the cup,” He said, “in remembrance of Me.” Nothing more beautifully simple could be conceived.

But in the course of the centuries the Church has lost sight of the simplicity that is in Christ. I hate to speak in controversy about the Supper of our Lord. But with what vast accretions men have overlaid that simple feast! It was “after supper” Jesus took the bread. And now we are told the Communion is no real Communion unless it is taken fasting! The bread and the wine are now converted into the very body and blood of the Lord—whence the custom of Reservation and Adoration.

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The feast is no longer a beautiful feast of remembrance ; it is now a repetition of the awful sacrifice of Calvary. And this beautiful and simple feast, which used to be celebrated, perhaps each night, in Christian households, with the father as ministrant, can now only be celebrated when there is a priest present to consecrate the elements. What a vast departure this is from the "simplicity that was in Christ" and who would recognise the meal in the Upper Room in the sacrifice of the Roman Mass ?

And as it has been with the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper, so has it been also with the Church itself. The Church, as our Lord thought of it, was composed of those who loved Him and believed Him to be the Son of God. "Upon this rock," He said, (*i.e.*, not upon Peter, but upon people who, like Peter, could say, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God"), "I will build My Church." As far as I can make out, there was only one question which Jesus asked ; it was this : "Lovest thou Me ?" And there was only one demand which He made : "Follow thou Me." All who loved and followed Him made up His Church. That is why Paul, cherishing the same simple but beautiful ideal of the Church, could say, "Grace be with all them that love the Lord Jesus Christ in

THE SIMPLICITY THAT WAS IN CHRIST sincerity." But we have left that simple idea of the Church far behind. Now we are told that to make a valid Church it must have an episcopate, and that episcopate must be the historic episcopate, and it must have a ministry episcopally ordained, and it must be based on certain great historic creeds. And, because men insist on adding these things to Christ's idea of a Church composed of those who love and follow Him, Christendom has been rent into fragments.

Attempts have been made of recent years to reunite our broken Christendom. I took my share in the Lambeth conversations between Anglicans and Free Churchmen. But oftentimes, as I sat there, when we were discussing the "validity of orders" and the claims of the Episcopate, I could not help feeling how utterly remote we were from the New Testament. Probably most of us have read the report of the conversations between representatives of the Roman Catholic Church and representatives of our own Anglican Church. The conversations gathered mainly around points like these: the Episcopate, the question whether Communion should be in one or two kinds, the celibacy of the clergy, the primacy of the Pope. I can find nothing about any one of these things in the New Testament, yet these

THE SIMPLICITY THAT WAS IN CHRIST are the things which keep Christians apart! Now, I do not deny that there is a truth in Newman's Doctrine of Development. I am not challenging the right of the Church to furnish itself with a ministry and to adopt such methods of organisation as may best nourish its life and promote its efficiency. But I should challenge the right of any such addition to be counted as essential to the very nature of the Church, otherwise we are landed in the absurd position that the Apostolic Church—the Church from which we all derive—was itself no Church at all. And when it comes to the question of reunion, I do not believe it will ever come about by assent and consent to these later developments. I don't believe the time will ever come when every Christian minister will submit to Episcopal ordination; I don't believe the time will ever come when all Christians will acknowledge the supremacy of the Pope. All attempts at reunion along those lines simply lead us into a blind alley. Reunion will come when we return to the "simplicity as it is in Christ," when we joyfully accept, as belonging to the Church, all who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity, and when we frankly admit that every fellowship of such lovers of the Lord is a Church. We may still have diversities of operation, diversities of ministration; but we shall have

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the real unity of the spirit—and that is what really matters. It is back to the simplicities we must come. I read one of Dean Inge's books recently, and in it he says more than once that in his judgment the Quakers are the truest Christians in the modern world. Well, the Quakers are the people who most completely observe the simplicity as it is in Christ. Indeed, as I have already said, in their passion for simplification they have gone too far and have discarded even the Lord's Supper. But they are nearer the truth than those who cumber up the Church with questions of orders and sacraments and creeds. Do you remember how Browning finishes his poem on Christmas Eve?

I then, in ignorance and weakness,
Taking God's help, have attained to think
My heart does best to receive in meekness
That mode of worship as most to his mind
Where, earthly aids being cast aside,
His All in All appears serene
With the thinnest human veil between.

And we shall best realise the nature of the Church and best promote its unity when we get behind the additions, and accretions of the centuries to the "simplicity that is in Christ."

II

And now having thus tried to expound the "simplicity that is *in* Christ," let me turn to the thought which is chiefly in the Apostle's mind—the simplicity which is *toward* Christ. I have already hinted at what it means. The Corinthians, when they first believed, put a complete and simple trust in Christ as Redeemer and Lord. Paul preached Christ crucified to them, and they committed themselves in humble faith to His redeeming and keeping grace. It was "Jesus only" with them then. But since then other things—the works of the Law—had claimed part of their trust, and they no longer put simple and undivided faith in Christ. And what the Apostle is doing here is calling them back to the simplicity which is toward Jesus—single, undivided trust in Him. He is anxious to present them as a pure virgin to Christ. And the characteristic of the pure virgin is that she has no eyes for any one save her intended husband. And so Paul would have these Corinthians give a single and undivided allegiance to Christ. He, and He alone, can save. He, and He alone, is sufficient for salvation. The works of the Law are superfluous. To put one's trust in them is to make the Cross of Christ of none effect. All that is wanted is

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their single-hearted faith in Christ and His
love—the simplicity that is towards Christ.

And the truth holds good still, and perhaps it
needs to be emphasised afresh in our hearing.
It is so easy to cumber up our Christianity, and
by cumbering it up to obscure it. I have been
greatly struck of late, in reading certain books
by men who are critics of Christianity, to notice
the things they criticise and the reasons they
give for not accepting Christianity themselves.
Almost invariably they fasten upon things that
are not of the essence of Christianity at all,
things which enlightened Christians have long
since abandoned. They quote what they call
the “ mistakes ” of the Bible ; they make much
of the moral defects of the Old Testament—
assuming, of course, that verbal inspiration is
still the faith of the Church, and that such a
thing as “ progressive Revelation ” is unknown ;
they criticise the creeds as if Christianity con-
sisted in the acceptance of the Nicene and
Athanasian creeds. Perhaps we have ourselves
(not been altogether guiltless of magnifying
non-essentials. But let it be said here and now
that the essential thing in Christianity is just
the acceptance of Jesus as Master and Lord
and Saviour. What makes a man a Christian
is not the understanding of Christian doctrine,
not membership in some particular Church.

Communion—what makes a man a Christian is this single-hearted faith in, and allegiance to, Christ. Everything else is secondary and non-essential. This is the one thing needful. “Lovest thou Me”? “Follow Me.” This is the thing that saves: this simplicity, this single-hearted devotion, which is toward Jesus.

Yr. obed. Servant, a list of names
I enc. you but that I don't say your
name.

CHRIST'S LIFE IN ST. PAUL

GALATIANS ii. 20.—“ I have been crucified with Christ : yet I live ; and yet no longer I, but Christ liveth in me.”

ON my journey to Australia I read an exceedingly beautiful and suggestive little book, entitled *St. Paul's Life of Jesus*. Many books about St. Paul have issued from the Press of recent years ; for, though St. Paul's theology in certain circles is very much at a discount, men cannot ignore or neglect the Apostle himself—he is the most commanding and arresting figure in the primitive Christian Church. I have read many, if not all, of these recent books, but I have found none of them so adequate and satisfying as the book I have just named. To understand St. Paul it has always seemed to me that a man must have shared to some extent in St. Paul's experience. To what William James calls a “ healthy minded person,” that is to say a person who has no deep sense of sin, all that Paul says about his own agony of soul, and about redemption and release through the Cross, is quite unintelligible. The Apostle is speaking in what to him is an unknown tongue. And so he dismisses those mighty chapters in his Epistle to the Romans, say from Chapter iv.

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to Chapter viii., as being Rabbinism, and tells us that the Apostle, though he had broken with the Mosaic Law, had not really emancipated himself from the legalistic conception of things. The truth is, of course, that the man who dismisses these chapters as "Rabbinism" or "Legalism" is quite incompetent to discuss them at all. It needs a man who has endured a similar travail of soul to understand these mighty chapters. That is why Martin Luther understood them so well. And, to the man who knows something about the sin of his own heart, those chapters are not barren and antiquated Rabbinism—they meet somehow the deepest needs of his guilty soul. Well, this book, *St. Paul's Life of Christ*, is written by one who is able to understand St. Paul because he sympathises with him in those great deeps, and so I repeat that to me it has been the most satisfactory book on St. Paul of recent years.

But it is not about *St. Paul's Life of Christ* that I want to speak—though the sermon that I am about to preach was suggested by that fresh and illuminating book. What I want to speak about is *Christ's Life in St. Paul*. Paul himself was quite aware of it. That is what he says by way of accounting for his career: "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." That is not to say that the

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native and aboriginal Saul was extirpated and destroyed. Jesus, when He takes possession of a man, does not destroy his personality, He uses it. Saul's learning, Saul's energy, Saul's flaming enthusiasm—Jesus wanted those for His own service. When He laid hold of Saul, He did not repress or exterminate these qualities. He converted them to higher uses and nobler ends. But while Saul remained essentially the same personality after his conversion that he was before, his whole life came under another direction and mastery. If the *will* is the governing faculty in life, it would be true to say that Saul came under the direction of another *will*. Prior to Damascus it was his own will; after Damascus it was Christ's will. And not only Christ's *will* in his direction, but Christ's living presence as his *power*, so that he could say with simple truth: "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." It was as if Christ's Personality had invaded his, and taken complete possession of it. Of course, this is what every Christian disciple is expected to do—to let Christ live in him, and we are good Christians or poor Christians according to the measure in which Christ lives in us. That is really the meaning of the Christian life—it means allowing Christ's will to replace ours, and allowing His presence so to fill our soul that we shall

have power to obey His will. But no one in all history allowed Christ to take such complete possession of him as did St. Paul. Perhaps it might be contended that, so far as outward conditions and circumstances went, Francis came nearer than any one else to reproducing the life of Jesus—though I am not quite sure even about that—but in inner experience Paul left Francis far behind. There is a strange parallelism, even, between the great crises in the life of our Lord and those which took place in the life of St. Paul. Paul did verily enter into the fellowship of his Lord's sufferings. He suffered the kind of things Jesus Himself suffered. Christ, if I may so put it, re-lived the great crises of His earthly career in the tremendous experiences of the great Apostle of the Gentiles. Perhaps there ought to be nothing surprising to us in this—for did not Jesus Himself say that the servant was not above his Master nor the disciple above his Lord, that it was as much as any servant could expect to be *as* his Master and the disciple *as* his Lord. The same kind of experiences that befell the Master were bound also to fall to the lot of His followers. But most of us, somehow, manage to escape the "privations, sorrows, bitter scorn" which marked our Lord's consecrated road. But Paul escaped none of them.

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Christ lived them over again in the experience of His servant. It is to some of these parallelisms between the life of Christ and the life of Paul that I want now to call your attention.

THE TEMPTATION AND ARABIA

Paul had a spiritual birthday. It was the day when the risen Lord appeared to him on the way to Damascus. This is how he describes that mighty happening: "it pleased God to reveal His Son in me." He was born, he says, out of due time, but back to that great day he turns whenever he gives an account of his own spiritual history. Paul reckoned that life only began when Jesus was born in a man's soul. He would agree with that old man who came to Christ at the end of his life, and who reckoned that the couple of years he had spent in Christ's service were the only years in which he had really lived, and who therefore left orders that it should be thus written on his tombstone: "John Evans"—died such and such a date—"aged two years." That was why the Apostle travailed in pain until Christ was born in the hearts of his hearers—a man only began to live when Christ lived in him. Well, Paul began to live on that memorable day when he saw the Lord. Now

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I am not going to compare the baptism of Jesus with the conversion of St. Paul, except for one thing. It was at the baptism Jesus received His call to His life-work ; it was at his conversion that Paul received his. It was at the baptism Jesus was summoned to commence His Messianic ministry ; it was at his conversion that Saul knew he was to become a preacher of Jesus Christ and Him crucified. After the baptism Jesus was carried away by the spirit into the wilderness, and passed through that time of spiritual conflict which we know as the Temptation. Our Lord then faced the issues. He knew that He had powers which, if He exercised them for selfish ends, would give Him the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them. He knew, too, that the way of earthly conquest and glory was not His Father's way for Him—that His Father's way led through rejection and shame to the Cross. And there in the wilderness He fought the battle out, fought down the desire to take the easiest way, and learned to say to God : “ Thy will be done.”

And the Apostle Paul had an experience very similar, for, immediately after the revolutionising experience that came to him near to Damascus, he went away into Arabia, and, in the grim solitude whereof old Moses had received the Law, he fought his own battles out. In Arabia, Paul

had to reconstruct all his theological thinking. He had to find room for the Cross in his scheme of things. The Cross had been to him the final and conclusive proof that Jesus was an impostor. But, now that he knew Jesus to be the Son of God, he knew that Cross, too, must have been in God's purpose. And he had to recast his whole theological outlook so as to make it fit in with this tremendous and shattering fact that God's Messiah came not to a crown, but to a Cross. But, in Arabia, Paul had not only to do some deep and searching thinking, but he had to face up to the issues, so far as his own life was concerned. Up to this point he had been the rising hope of the Pharisaic party. He gave every sign of becoming the most influential leader in the Sanhedrin—which in turn meant being the religious leader of the Jewish people. Everything the world could give in the shape of position and power and fame was well within Rabbi Saul's grasp ; while, on the other hand, to accept Christ's call and throw in his lot with the Christians meant to lose every friend he had and to become a social outcast—to be hated as a renegade to his people and his faith. The flesh lusted against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh, and I can believe that out there in Arabia Paul too sweated, as it were, great drops of blood as he fought against the

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temptations wherewith Satan plied his soul. Not without strong crying and tears and a conflict that scarred his soul did Paul learn to count all things but dung that he might gain Christ. What the wilderness was to Jesus, Arabia was to Paul. In Arabia Paul entered into the fellowship of our Lord's wilderness sufferings ; and in Arabia Jesus lived over again His own wilderness temptation: "I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

NAZARETH AND TARSUS

I pass on now to compare the beginnings of Paul's ministry with the beginnings of the ministry of Jesus. Quite early in our Lord's ministry He went to preach to Nazareth, the place where He had been brought up, the place in which as boy and man He had lived for well-nigh thirty years. He was eager to preach His Gospel first of all to those who were His kinsfolk and His friends. I have wondered sometimes what sort of a reception it was that Jesus expected to get at Nazareth. Did He expect to be received with open arms? Did He expect that the Nazarenes would be filled with enthusiasm because such a prophet had arisen in their midst? What actually happened we know. When Jesus began to talk about the mercy which God showed to

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people outside the limit of the Jewish nation, the congregation that listened to Him were seized with a sort of blind and frenzied rage, and, taking Him to the brow of the hill on which their city was built, would have flung Him down headlong. That is what the Nazarenes would have done to Jesus if they could—they would have murdered Him. But I don't think the murderous hate of the townsfolk hurt Jesus as much as the unbelief He met with in His own home. I think Mary, His mother, was frankly puzzled. She remembered the wonder of His birth and the strange and marvellous things that had been told her by the shepherds. She had often pondered those things in her heart. But the course which Jesus took was so totally different from the one she had anticipated for Him that Mary's faith was shaken and she scarcely knew what to think. But His brothers made no secret of their attitude. They simply did not believe on Him. Their account of their elder Brother was that He was mad. How deeply the unbelief of the Nazarenes and of His own nearest and best cut into the heart of Jesus perhaps we cannot guess—but it was one of the bitterest ingredients in His bitter cup.

And when I turn from the Master to the servant, I find the experiences of Jesus almost paralleled in the experience of St. Paul. After Arabia,

according to his own account, he returned to Damascus, and then went on to Jerusalem. I wonder, did he expect the Jerusalem Christians to welcome him with open arms? I wonder, did he expect them to rejoice over him as a mighty illustration of the converting power of Christ? If so, he must have been bitterly disappointed, for this is what actually happened: "When he was come to Jerusalem, he essayed to join himself to the disciples; and they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple." Perhaps there was some excuse for them—but what a humbling experience it must have been for Paul. The Christians in Jerusalem cold-shouldered him. They didn't believe in his conversion. They thought he was a spy. It might have gone hard with Paul at that juncture in his life; Paul might have been lost to the Christian Church had it not been for Barnabas. Barnabas was big enough and generous enough to receive the one-time persecutor as a brother. But, speaking broadly, Paul's experience at Jerusalem was Jesus' experience at Nazareth over again. He found himself repudiated by the very people who ought to have been the first to welcome him.

Disappointed and hurt by his reception at Jerusalem, Paul, like a wounded animal, stole away home to Tarsus. And what happened at

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Tarsus, I wonder. I have just read a book called *Brother Saul*—a striking book in many respects—which, in the guise of a novel, professes to tell Paul's story. The writer of that book takes the view that, although Paul's parents were suspicious of him, they received him into the old home. I am not so sure about that. For, in giving an account of himself, Paul says that he was a Hebrew of Hebrews and that, touching the Law, he was a Pharisee. That is to say, the home from which he issued was a Jewish home of the strictest sort. So I am more inclined to the view that our Lord's experience in His home at Nazareth was repeated in the case of Paul and his home at Tarsus. It is a significant thing that we have no mention of Paul's father or mother, or a single reference to any relation of his, except that sister's son who gave warning of the plot against his life in Jerusalem. When he became a Christian, Paul's parents and his relations washed their hands of him. F. W. H. Myer's picture is true :

Yes, without cheer of sister or of daughter,
Yes, without stay of father or of son,
Lone on the land and homeless on the water,
Pass I in patience till the work be done.

Paul had to give up father and mother and brothers and sisters for the Gospel's sake.

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When he found himself made "as the filth of the world and the off-scouring of all things," Paul understood the bitterness of our Lord's rejection. In Jerusalem and Tarsus Paul entered into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings in Nazareth, and in Jerusalem and Tarsus Jesus experienced over again the bitterness of His rejection in Nazareth and His own home.

THE TWO MINISTRIES

Let me next call your attention to the way in which, in the reception of his Gospel, Paul re-lived the experiences of Jesus. Jesus had His brief day of popularity when the people crowded to hear him and were content throughout the long hours of the day to hang upon his lips. But, again speaking broadly, Jesus was a disappointed and rejected preacher. So much so that the fourth Evangelist quotes of Him and applies to Him that sad and piercing complaint of the prophet: "Who hath believed our report, and to whom hath the arm of the Lord been revealed?" The people as a whole deserted Jesus when He talked to them about eating His flesh and drinking His blood. And, when He came to die, all His followers could be gathered into one Upper Room.

And Paul shared in the experiences of Jesus in

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this respect, and the Master suffered again in the sufferings of His disciple. For that is what I read about the experience of Paul—that rejection was his almost invariable lot. At Antioch, where he began his work, the Jews contradicted the things which were spoken by Paul and blasphemed. At Iconium Jews and Gentiles made an attempt to entreat him shamefully and to stone him. On the Areopagus the wise men of Athens laughed at him. At Corinth things were so discouraging that Paul was half tempted to give up the work in despair. Felix put him off to a more convenient season. Festus thought him mad. Agrippa gibed at him. And the last glimpse we get of him is of his interview with the Jewish elders in Rome, who displayed the same stubborn spirit of unbelief. In his experiences as a preacher Paul re-lived the experiences of Jesus. “I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.”

THE JERUSALEM EXPERIENCES

And the parallelism between Jesus and Paul becomes even more striking as their respective careers drew to a close. At a certain point of time Jesus left Galilee—where, for a time, at any rate, there had been some enthusiasm—for Jerusalem. Now, Jerusalem had never been

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kind to Jesus. From the very first it had taken up an attitude of hostility towards Him. And the hostility had hardened and deepened as the months passed, until it had become a bitter and murderous hate. And yet, at a certain point, Jesus stedfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem. He knew what was to befall Him there. He was under no illusions. He knew that visit would end in a cross. His disciples, who could not foresee all that lay ahead, but who knew that a visit to Jerusalem was dangerous, sought to dissuade Him. "The Jews were but now seeking to stone Thee," they said, "and goest Thou thither again?" But Jesus was not to be diverted from His purpose. He knew that Jerusalem was in God's plan for Him, and so to Jerusalem He went.

And at a certain stage in his career Paul too turned his face toward Jerusalem. He had made a collection amongst the Gentile churches for the poor saints who were in Jerusalem, and he believed it was God's will that he should deliver the money in person. He went, "bound in the spirit," unto Jerusalem. He was under no illusion as to what might happen to him there. The poignancy of the sorrow at the parting with the elders of the Ephesian Church was due to the fact that he told them they would probably see his face no

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more. Even if he himself had been under any illusion, his friends were not. More than once on that journey his friends sought to dissuade him from his purpose. At Tyre, *e.g.*, the disciples, through the Spirit, warned him that he should not set foot in Jerusalem. At Cæsarea Philippi, Agabus the prophet bound his feet and hands, and said: "So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles." But not even that availed to shake Paul's resolve. Like the Lord, he steadfastly set his face to go to Jerusalem. And there he entered still more deeply into the sufferings of Jesus. Jesus lived over again the experiences of Passion Week in the bitter experiences of Paul in Jerusalem. Perhaps one of the cruellest wounds Jesus suffered in that last week was inflicted by Judas. The traitor was one of His own chosen companions. I cannot measure the grief and pain that throb in that pathetic little sentence, "One of you shall betray me." Paul came to understand the darkness of that night in which He was betrayed, when he too in that last visit suffered through the treachery of "false brethren." And just as Jesus was finally handed over to the Gentiles to be crucified and slain, so also was Paul handed over to the Roman authority,

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and was ultimately by that authority brought to the block at Rome. The disciple suffered even as the Master, and the Master suffered again in the disciple.

THE SPIRIT OF CHRIST IN PAUL

And now in a final word I call attention to another parallelism between Jesus and Paul, which indeed accounts for the similarity of experience. Mr. Griffith, in that book to which I have already referred, *St. Paul's Life of Christ*, says that Paul's own stripes and stigmata helped him to expound the wounds of Christ. So, no doubt, they did ; for why did Jesus suffer those cruel wounds and ultimately die that death of shame? And the answer is: He suffered and died for love. He loved us with so deep and strong a love, so mighty and measureless a love, that He was willing to take our place and go out into the deep night so long as we were restored into the sunshine of God's presence. And exactly the same kind of deep and wonderful love explains Paul's sufferings and death. He loved men and women so well that he had to carry his good news to them no matter what he might suffer in the process. He says he had continual heaviness and sorrow of heart for his brethren, his kinsmen after

the flesh, and he declares that he was willing to become "accursed from Christ" if only they might be saved. He was willing, that is, to forfeit his own share in Christ, and to go out into the outer darkness, if thereby his kinsmen might be brought in. He was willing to bear their guilt and suffer in their place. And this mighty love of his which made him willing to become "anathema for Christ" helped Paul to understand the Cross—for I am one of those who think that Paul understood the Cross more fully than any one else, and penetrated more deeply into its significance. In the light of the love that flamed in his own heart, he came to see how, as Mr. Griffith says, it was in the Master's heart to be made a curse for us and how He bore our curse on the Cross. There was an identity of spirit between the Master and the servant. The deathless love that made Jesus bear the Cross for the sins of the world expresses itself again in the sufferings and death of Paul, and that passionate desire of his to become "accursed" if only his brethren could be saved.

And so Paul did mystically re-live the life of Christ. "I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." And, to give a practical application to all I have tried to say and to bring it home to our own business and bosoms, I want

to add this closing word. We are real Christians just in the proportion in which Christ re-lives His life in *us*. I am not thinking now of any external imitation of Jesus. The essential thing is the reproduction of His Spirit. There is no need to do even what Francis did—get rid of all our possessions, make poverty our bride, and become mendicant preachers. What made Francis the great saint he was was not his asceticism, but his entire devotion of spirit. Nor is it likely that a reproduction of the spirit of Jesus will issue in that strange parallelism of experience we have found between Him and the great Apostle to the Gentiles—though let me add that no man in whom Christ really lives must expect to get through life easily. We may not suffer ostracism and wounds and death, as he did, but still it is true that it is through much tribulation we enter the Kingdom.

But the main thing is the spirit. Indeed, the Apostle says that if we have not got the Spirit of Christ we are none of His. Well, have we got His Spirit? His spirit of absolute dedication to God? His spirit of love for men? His passion for souls? Have we got some of that spirit? Are we concerned simply to do the will of God? And do we love men in such a fashion that we are willing to suffer and sacrifice if only we can serve and save them? What are we to say to

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questions like these? We bear Christ's name—but does Christ live again in us? Not as fully as He ought, even in the best of us. Men do not see Christ in us. A new age will break for the world when they do. That is a touching story that is told by a missionary who, when preaching the Gospel in an inland town in China—where, so far as he knew, no missionary had ever been—as he was telling the people about Jesus was interrupted by voices from the crowd which said, "We know Him. He used to live here." The missionary tried to explain that the Jesus of whom he spoke lived nineteen centuries ago. "Oh, no," they said, "He lived here. We knew Him quite well. His grave is in our cemetery." They took the missionary to see the grave. And then the mystery was explained. It was the grave of an English doctor who had died some twenty years before; who had lived among these people, and ministered to them and served them and healed them. When they heard of Jesus they identified Him with this good man who had lived in their midst. It will be a great day when men and women see Jesus in us. When they can say, "We know Him quite well. He lives in our street." Can they say it? Not of any one of us fully, perhaps. But why shouldn't they? What is wanted is just that we should let Christ

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into our hearts, that we should allow Him to take complete possession of us. "Oh, Jesus Christ, grow Thou in me, and all things else recede." Then it will be true of us that "we live ; yet not we but Christ liveth in us."

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THE NEED OF THE INTERPRETER

33:23

JOB xxiii. 23.—“An interpreter among a thousand.”

THE sentence of my text is taken from the long speech wherewith Elihu sought to edify, if not to comfort, the patriarch Job. You will remember that Elihu was a young man who listened to the debate between Job and his three friends and who grew angrier and angrier as he listened—angry with Job because he would keep trying to justify himself and because he stubbornly asserted his innocence, and angry with the three friends because they were unable to answer Job's complaints and yet they continued to condemn him. Elihu thought he knew a little more than the older men—not an infrequent characteristic of youth—and at last, unable to contain himself any longer, he takes upon himself to justify the ways of God to man and to explain why Job, good man though he was, was compelled to endure such unspeakable miseries. I don't know that he succeeded any better than the older men had done; indeed, God—when at last His voice was heard—charged him with darkening counsel by words without knowledge. But, although as

an explanation of the ways of God's Providence the speech was a rather dismal failure, Elihu did manage in the course of it to say certain true things, and what he said in the words I have quoted as my text is one of them. For what he says here is practically this : that sometimes to suffering men an angel from God will come—one of the thousands that do God's bidding—and will flash light upon the meaning and purpose of their sufferings. He *interprets* their pains and sorrows for them, with the result that they are delivered from the pit of despair, and see again the face of God with joy.

Now, all that is true. Our human experience proves it to be true. Men have come to see that there was meaning and purpose in the pains they had to endure—so that they have been able, with one of the sacred writers, to say, "it was good for me that I was afflicted." Time is often the interpreting angel—as it was, for example, in the case of Joseph. At the moment, it seemed sheer disaster and calamity that he should be sold into slavery in Egypt. But with the lapse of time he saw good in that seeming ill—so that he could say to his conscience-stricken brothers, "It was not you who sent me hither, but God."

Though it must be added that there are some sorrows and sufferings which even the lapse of

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time does not explain. They remain puzzling, baffling, inexplicable to the finish. For the interpretation of them we shall have to wait with what patience we can command until, in God's light, we see light.

But it is not of the interpretation of sorrow and pain in particular that I want to speak just now—but of the broad truth that, for the full understanding of most things, an interpreter is necessary; and I want specially to show how this was true of God and how it still holds true of Jesus. God needed an "interpreter" to explain Himself to men, and Christ still needs "interpreters" if He is to be understood and received as Lord of mankind.

I

Let me begin by saying a word or two about the general truth that things have to be "interpreted" to us before they are rightly understood. There are things of the common day, things in familiar use which we think we know, but when a scientist comes and tells us about them we begin to realise that we really did not know about them at all. Take, for example, what is now a possession of well-nigh every home—the wireless set. We all use it. We all enjoy it. But how it comes about that we can sit in our

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armchairs at home and listen to the voice of the preacher in St. Martin's or a singer in Berlin or a concert in Rome we do not know until the expert comes and tells us about the vibrations in the atmosphere and the varying wave lengths, and so on. The wonder of it has to be "interpreted" to us before we understand how it came to pass.

Or take the tiny little creatures of our gardens or the insides of our houses—bees, ants, spiders. They are familiar enough to look at, and perhaps we think that we know all there is to be known about them because we know the spider weaves webs and the bees build their combs and store them with honey, and the ants live in communities; but let a Lubbock come and talk to us about the bees, or a Fabre come and talk to us about spiders and ants and other creatures of the insect world, and we begin to realise that we knew nothing about them at all. They needed an "interpreter" to make us realise what wonderful creatures they are.

Or take the stars. We know, of course, in a general sort of way that the stars are not mere points of light but vast worlds. But it is only when a Sir Robert Ball comes and talks to us about them, about their size, about their distance from us, about the orbits which they

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follow, that all the wonder of the starry heavens begins to reveal itself to our astonished minds. The skies need an "interpreter" if they are to be understood.

Or take the round of the seasons and the alternations of day and night. I suppose ever since our world has been a habitable earth, day has followed night and night has followed day, spring has followed winter, and summer has followed spring, and autumn has followed summer, and so on. The fact of this sequence was known to the rude forefathers of our race, and they put what they knew to practical use. But why night and day should follow one another and why the seasons should pursue one another in regular sequence, no one exactly knew until Copernicus arose to tell mankind not only that the earth revolved on its own axis every twenty-four hours, but that it also circled round the sun. Men needed an "interpreter" before they could understand.

Or take the rocks. It is only comparatively recently men have come to understand the rocks. To our fathers of a couple of generations back the rocks were just rocks, varying, no doubt, in appearance and hardness, but just rocks, and there was no more to be said. And then came Sir Charles Lyell to tell us that the rocks were not simply rocks; they were books—

books on whose pages the story of the world's beginnings was written. But the story of the rocks was written in a script unknown to the ordinary man. The meaning of the hieroglyphs written by flood and ice and volcanic upheaval had passed unnoticed by generation after generation of men. They needed the "interpreter" before it could be understood.

Or, to pass from Nature to man, it is only by the aid of an interpreter we can get to know and understand one another. Every human being is, so to speak, a separate world, divided from every other human being by a gulf far more impassable than the seas which sunder nations. Every human personality is an unexplored world, a *terra incognita*, except as he chooses to interpret himself. We have an old proverb, "a penny for your thoughts," which implies that a man's inner personality is an impenetrable solitude except as he chooses to reveal himself. But we have means of bridging the gulf that separates us from one another. We have methods of "interpreting" ourselves to one another. I do not say that the interpretation is always true. Sometimes the interpretation is deliberately meant to mislead. Rogues, *e.g.*, invariably try to pass themselves off as honest men. Still, there the fact is, we have means of self-interpretation. There are

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our eyes—perhaps the most truthful interpreters of our inmost souls. And there are our hands: a hand-grip is often a very revealing thing. But, above all else, there is speech. Speech is simply our method of self-interpretation. We may feel sometimes that speech—at least the only speech we can command—doesn't adequately convey our thought or our feeling. The lover feels words inadequate to express his devotion, the preacher often finds words insufficient to express the great thoughts that are in his soul. But words are the best interpreters we have. Without the aid of words, we should live in an intolerable isolation and loneliness, and should spend our lives complete and utter strangers to one another. Speech is the interpreter which enables us to understand and appreciate one another.

II

Now, I want to go on to show how the same truth applies in the highest realm of all. "To know God is eternal life," says this old Book. And men have always felt that that was so, hence their eager attempts to discover what God is like. All religions bear witness to man's search for God. All religions bear witness to this conviction of man's soul that his happiness depends

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on knowing God and being reconciled to Him. And if, on the one hand, man was eager to discover God, God was equally eager to reveal Himself to men. For God in His inmost nature is Love, and if man could only be truly happy by getting to know God, so God, because he was Love, could not be content till He had won the love of men. But God, to make Himself known in such fashion as to satisfy the cravings of the human soul and to win the love of the human heart, needed an interpreter.

God had a partial interpreter in *Nature*. The Creator revealed Himself in some measure in His Creation. Men have never been able seriously to contemplate this world—its beauty, the evidences of wisdom and skill, its solemn and impressive orderliness, without being constrained to believe that behind it all there was some great and wise and mighty Being. As Paul puts it—I quote Dr. Moffatt's version for the sake of plainness and point—"ever since the world was created God's invisible nature, His everlasting power and Divine being, have been quite perceptible in what He has made." Everlasting Power and Divine Being! Wisdom and a certain Inexorability—these ideas about God Nature conveys. But they are not the whole of God. Natural Religion only reveals parts of His ways. Even the Greeks felt that—which was the reason

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why they erected their altar to the Unknown God.

Then God has an interpreter in a man's own *soul*. He has His witness in every man in the shape of conscience and the moral sense. The word is nigh us. God has put His law in our inward parts and in our hearts has He written it. And every man who listens to his conscience and who considers that moral law written upon his heart will learn something about God—something higher and nobler than Nature can tell him—for conscience will speak, not so much of God's wisdom and power, as of His righteousness, His purity, His holiness. But purity and holiness and righteousness, great qualities though they are, are not the whole of God. Conscience can only reveal part of His ways. And there is always this peril in looking within for God—that we should make God after our own image. Conscience is only a partial interpreter.

And then there is the *experience of saintly and gifted men*. For the fact cannot be denied that there have arisen in the course of the centuries men whom we rightly call "inspired," men who got an insight into the nature of God not vouchsafed to ordinary mortals. I am not concerned at the moment to define inspiration nor to explain how inspiration

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comes. I don't know that it can be explained. The Spirit bloweth where it listeth. But you can detect its presence by its effects. "Thou hearest the sound thereof." And there the fact stands, that men like the psalmists and prophets of the Old Testament were specially inspired men. They had wonderful glimpses into the nature of God, and in their psalms and prophecies they told mankind what they saw. They elevated the whole conception of God. They helped to "interpret" Him to men.

And yet, when Nature and a man's own soul and the inspired men of the Old Testament had done their best, God had not been fully or truly interpreted. For the ultimate truth about God is His *love*, His *grace*. Wisdom, power, holiness are attributes of God, but He *is* love, He *is* grace. And this ultimate truth no psalmist or prophet had ever glimpsed. I think those inspired men knew that there was much in God they had not discovered. One of them cries in a kind of despair, "Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour." They knew they hadn't found out the Almighty unto perfection. And just because men did not know the full truth about God, they did not give to God what He wanted from men—which was love and devotion. And

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because God hungered for men's love He resolved to send another Interpreter who should reveal to men the fact of His own mighty, seeking, and redeeming love. And so He sent His Son. Jesus is God's real Interpreter. That is a significant title the fourth Evangelist applies to Him. He calls Him the Logos—the Word. Jesus is God's "word"; in Him God tells us what He is like. "No man hath seen God at any time, save the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father. He hath revealed Him." He has "exegeted" Him. He has explained Him. He has interpreted Him. Jesus is God made visible, so to speak. The final truth about God is that He is like Jesus. "He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father." The pity and compassion and love we see in Jesus are the pity and compassion and love that dwell in the heart of God. The riddle of God is explained, the problem is solved; He has interpreted Himself to us fully and completely in Jesus. There are lots of things in life I cannot explain; there are lots of things in Nature that baffle and perplex me, but I turn from life and Nature to Jesus, and, in spite of all bewildering and baffling things, I know that God is love. Jesus is "an interpreter among a thousand."

III

Now let me pass on to say that Jesus Himself needs to be interpreted if He is to be accepted and believed in of mankind. And here I come to the practical point, to which all the rest of my sermon was meant to lead up. I am inclined to say that the most urgent need of our day is the right interpretation of Jesus to men. I am constantly being made to feel that the main cause of the modern revolt against religion is that men haven't seen the real Jesus. They have seen some caricature of Him. He has not been truly interpreted to them. I read some of the reasons men give for turning their backs on the Church and the Christian faith, and in case after case I find it is due to false interpretations of Jesus. And I have a firm persuasion in me that if Jesus is truly interpreted to men, if He is seen as He is, men of honest and candid mind will still rise up and follow Him. For some have only seen Christ as interpreted in the Creeds, and the Creeds give us, not the loving, tender Jesus, but a philosophical abstraction, an exercise in metaphysics. I am not disparaging the Creeds. They were inevitable. They were necessary. They give the Church's intellectual account of Jesus. They relate Him

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to God and to men. But the Christ of the Creeds is a distant and unreal figure. It is not the Jesus who was the Friend and Helper and Redeemer of lost and wayward men. And some have only seen Christ as interpreted in the Church, and the Church has hidden the Jesus of the seamless robe—hidden Him beneath the pomp and pageantry of its worship and the elaborateness of its ecclesiasticisms. Copes and mitres and gorgeous vestments do not really help men to see Jesus. And the emphasis some of us lay on our ecclesiasticisms scarcely reminds men of Him who laid such small stress on organisation and who said, "He that is not against us is for us." A Christianity torn and rent by its ecclesiasticisms doesn't help men to see Jesus. And multitudes have turned their backs upon Him because they have only seen Him in this false interpretation of Him.

What is wanted to bring men in humble adoration to His feet is that He should be truly interpreted to them. And how is He to be thus interpreted? Well, there are good and able men who try to do it by writing books about Him. They write Lives of Christ, and to many who have undertaken this task all of us who have read their books are immensely indebted. But the perfect life of Christ has got to be written. And, in any case, books will never interpret

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Jesus, for the simple but sufficient reason that the people who need to have Him interpreted to them never read these books. Then we preachers try to do it by our sermons. We try to make people see the kind of Person Jesus was. I don't say we always succeed. Every preacher has his own view-point, and his representations are often partial. And, in any case, sermons are never going to give the interpretation of Jesus that is needed, again for the simple reason that the people who need to have Jesus interpreted to them never enter our churches to hear us preach. How, then, is Jesus to be interpreted to those who are without? I reply in those familiar lines :

The dear Lord's best interpreters
Are humble human souls,
The Gospel of a life like hers
Is more than books or scrolls.

We ourselves have got to interpret Him. In a sense we are the only people who can interpret Him to the great indifferent multitude. If they are to see Jesus at all, they must see Him in your lives and mine. For books about Jesus they do not read, and sermons about Him they do not listen to ; but they are every day reading you and me, and they are receiving their impressions of Jesus from what they see in you

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and me who bear His name. If they are to understand how holy and loving and forgiving Jesus was, they must learn it by seeing those very qualities in us. There have been men and women who have so lived that people have seen Jesus in them and been led to adore and worship Him. In that well-nigh forgotten novel, *Robert Elsmere*, a working man is made to say of the man who laboured with such devotion amongst the poor, "I have seen God in you." Dr. Stalker tells a story about a young lad who applied to him for membership in his church, and when asked what made him wish to give himself to Christ, he replied quite simply that it was the Christian character of the foreman under whom he worked that had drawn him. England has just celebrated the centenary of Mrs. Josephine Butler, that brave and consecrated woman who did so noble a work for girls who had gone astray. I have often thought that those poor lost creatures must have seen Jesus over again in Mrs. Butler. For she reproduced our Lord's seeking and healing love. That scene in Simon's house when Jesus, in face of the scorn of the assembled guests, defended and befriended that sobbing penitent, and said to her, "Thy sins are forgiven thee," was reproduced by this refined, cultured, devoted woman, who not only visited the various

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refuges and homes, but kept in her own house a room into which any poor wretched girl was free to come, and where Mrs. Butler lavished upon her all a mother's love. In Mrs. Butler they saw with their own eyes the Jesus who came to seek and to save that which was lost. That is the only way in which Jesus can be interpreted to those who are without.

And that suggests the question: are *we* interpreting Him? Truly interpreting Him? Are people getting to understand the kind of Person Jesus was by what they see in us? Or is the indifference of the vast multitude of our folk due to the fact that we have failed properly to interpret Him? For it is so fatally easy to misinterpret. I have never had occasion to speak through an interpreter except during ten days I spent in Travancore some two years ago. I shall never forget my first experience. I was preaching early in the morning in a large church. I thought I had made allowance for the extra time interpreting would necessitate. But I hadn't reckoned with my interpreter. For my short and simple sentences as he gave them to the congregation grew into long, sonorous, eloquent periods. I didn't understand the language, and so was in no position to judge; but I somehow felt it wasn't my sermon that was being retailed to the congregation, but that

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the interpreter was adorning it with eloquence of his own. I met with other interpreters not nearly so eloquent, but who seemed to me to be much nearer the original. What those people got of the preacher really depended on the interpretation. And what people get of Jesus, what they see of Him, what they think of Him, depends on you and me. We are His living interpreters. Well, are we truly interpreting Him? Really reproducing His Spirit? Do they see in us Jesus' complete and utter freedom from concern about this world's wealth? Do we reproduce His spirit of detachment? And do they see His purity in us? And His unselfishness? And His kindness? And His seeking love? And do they see in us the same utter devotion to the will of God? Do you think the world would be scornful and indifferent if in spirit and life we truly interpreted Christ? Let me finish with a story Dr. Stanley Jones tells in his latest book. A Hindu speaker, addressing a Hindu audience, told this incident from his own experience: "I once saw Christ, and I have never forgotten the vision. The plague was raging in the city and everybody had fled in terror except the sick and the dying. Whole sections were deserted. I drove down through that plague-stricken section, and to my surprise I saw a missionary lady, Mrs. D——, coming out

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of the houses where there was plague. She came with her hands extended before her, and she said, ' I am sorry, Mr. S——, that I cannot shake hands with you, for my hands are plague-stained.' As I looked at her with her plague-stained hands, I saw Christ." Christ, the real Christ, was interpreted for that Hindu by that devoted, ministering woman, and the sight of that Christ, helpful, loving, sacrificial, won his heart.

And if we in our respective spheres only rightly interpreted Him, reproduced Him in His goodness and seeking and redeeming love ; if only Christ lived in us, it would not be long before men and women would give Him their glad allegiance, and so He would see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied.

From scheme and creed the light goes out,
The saintly fact survives ;
The blessed Master none can doubt,
Revealed in holy lives.

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LUKE xiii. 23, 24.—“And one said unto Him, Lord, are they few that be saved? And He said unto them, Strive to enter in by the narrow door: for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able.”

WE are not told what prompted this unnamed person to ask this question. Godet seems to suggest that on the way perhaps Jesus had spoken about His rejection at the hands of the Jews and their consequent exclusion from the blessings of the Messianic Kingdom. That may quite easily have been so. Or this question may have been the sort of question that was often discussed in what we should call the “religious circles” of that day, much as the question of the efficacy of Christ’s atonement—whether it availed for the whole world or was limited to the elect—was a question of fierce and vehement debate in England here, and perhaps still more in Scotland, a century ago. It was the kind of question that would have a peculiar fascination for curious minds—especially in face of the fact that the whole Gentile world was considered by the Jews to lie outside the covenanted mercies of God. It is an aboriginal weakness of this human nature of ours to be keenly interested

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in our neighbour's affairs, and we find a kind of morbid satisfaction when we can pity and compassionate them because their condition is worse than our own. The Jew, as we know, plumed himself on his advantage over the Gentile so far as the Divine favour was concerned, and it may be that some of that sense of superiority expressed itself in this question, "Lord, are they few that be saved?" Anyhow, it was a purely speculative question, a theoretical question, a question of mere curiosity, and Jesus declined to answer. Instead of satisfying the questioner's curiosity, He spoke to him and all others within earshot about practical duty. It is exactly as if He said, "*The number* of the saved is no concern of yours. That is a matter for Almighty God. Your business is to see that you are saved yourselves. 'Strive to enter in by the narrow door: for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able.'"

I

This was eminently characteristic of Jesus. He was constantly calling men's minds back from the speculative question to the immediate duty. The speculative question might be difficult to answer, but the immediate duty was plain. Take that scene that occurred at the

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Resurrection appearance by the Lake. I believe *that* appearance took place specially for Peter's benefit. Jesus wanted to make that impulsive Apostle feel that, in spite of the denial in the Judgment Hall, he had a right to his place in the circle of the Apostolate. So, after breakfast was over, He took Peter aside and addressed to him that thrice-repeated question, "Lovest thou Me?" and laid upon him that three-fold duty, "Feed My lambs; Tend My sheep; Feed My sheep." And then He proceeded to hint at things concerning Peter's future. And Peter, to whom the interview had been painful enough, and who had perhaps shuddered a bit as he heard Jesus speak of the days when others should gird him and carry him whither he did not wish to go, turning about, caught sight of John; and whether it was out of a desire to give a new turn to the conversation or whether it was because he was genuinely interested in John—for John and Peter, you must remember, were close companions and bosom friends—he asked Jesus, "Lord, and what shall this man do?" And our Lord refused to answer that question. He told him that what might happen to John was no concern of his. "If I will that he tarry till I come, what is that to thee?" His business was to follow Jesus, himself. "Follow *thou* me." The question of curiosity

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all day long
is left unanswered ; it is the immediate, personal duty that is stressed. In another post-Resurrection interview our Lord's disciples asked this question : " Lord, dost Thou at this time restore the Kingdom to Israel ? " They were tremendously interested in dates. They wanted to have the future plainly mapped out for them. They were specially intrigued by this question of the coming of the Kingdom. They were continually talking about it amongst themselves. But, once again, Jesus refused to satisfy their curiosity. " It is not for you to know times or seasons which the Father hath set within His own authority." From speculative questions about the date of the Kingdom, Jesus recalls their minds to their immediate task. " Ye shall be My witnesses," He said, " both in Jerusalem and in all Judæa and Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth." The question of curiosity was left unanswered ; the immediate personal duty was stressed.

All of which has got its lesson for us to-day. There are people still who are tremendously interested in theoretical and speculative questions. People love to debate great theological issues. Now, I don't want to be misunderstood. I have no criticism to pass upon the theologian, the man who brings a trained intellect to bear upon the great problems which religion raises. But there

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is no need for us to defer giving our allegiance to Jesus till all these problems are solved—until we can understand the relations of the three Persons in the Godhead, until we can explain the mystery of evil, until we have formulated a satisfactory theory of the Atonement. I think Jesus would say to us, “Leave these questions alone; your duty is to strive to enter in at the narrow gate.” There are speculative questions which baffle the wisest, but the vital things are plain, so that a wayfaring man, though a fool, need not err therein. “Follow thou Me.”

And there are other questions which really don't concern us at all, but which exercise a tremendous fascination over some people—that old question of the date of the Second Coming, the question about the fate of the heathen (not very unlike the question asked in my text), and the duration of punishment, and the like. People emphasise these things as if they were all-important, whereas they do not touch the vital thing. Such questions as those are not our affair—we must leave them to Almighty God—our business is to make our own calling and election sure. From speculation Jesus calls us to duty, from theory to practice. “Are they few that be saved?” “Strive to enter in by the narrow door.”

II

But leaving now our Lord's refusal to answer the question of curiosity, and concentrating on the positive demand He makes, I want you, first of all, to notice that word *strive*. "Strive to enter in." The Greek word is *αγωνιζεσθε* from which our English word "agony" is derived. So that, transliterated, the sentence would read, "agonise to enter in by the narrow door." The agony is unavoidable, just because the door is narrow. You cannot drive a coach-and-four through this door. "Nobody," as one old saint said, "can go to Heaven on a feather bed." If you want to discover what this "agony" really means, you will find plenty of passages in the New Testament to enlighten you. For example, the door is so narrow that it will not admit a man and his sin. The first demand made upon us, if we want to enter the Kingdom of God, is the demand to *repent*. There is no entrance without *repentance*. Now, repentance doesn't simply mean being sorry for our sins; it means putting our sins away, tearing out of our hearts the lusts and passions that we have cherished there. And that is an agonising job. For, even when conscience condemns a habit, and we know it to be evil, we cling to it,

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and it is sheer torture to give it up. Take, for example, the drink habit. Probably not one of us knows anything about it by actual experience, but we know about it by reading and by hearsay. To emancipate oneself from the habit, once a man is in its grip, is a terrible business. I read in one of Stephen Graham's books the other day about a Russian who was the slave of vodka. At the beginning of his conversion all he could do was to pledge himself for the day, and even the one day tried him to the limit. He went through an agonising conflict every time he passed the vodka shop. And yet, whatever the cost in the shape of agony, that habit *has* to be given up. The demand is inexorable. For there the solemn warning stands. "No drunkard shall inherit the Kingdom of God." Perhaps, as I have said, this matter of enslavement to drink doesn't touch any one of us. But we have our own besetting sin, some ugly passion which we hug and cherish, and which we find it desperately hard to give up. That is why the Apostle uses the word "crucify" to describe this putting away of evil habit and besetting sin. "Crucify the flesh," he says, "with the passions and lusts thereof." The pain is so "excruciating" that the word "crucify" is the only word strong enough to describe it.

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And it isn't simply gross sins of the flesh that we have to repudiate and abjure. There are other things to which no stigma of shame attaches, and which we scarcely account to be sins at all, which we must get rid of if we would enter in by the narrow door. The door is not wide enough to admit them and us. "Put ye also away all these," says the Apostle: "anger, wrath, malice, railing, shameful speaking." We have to tear these things out of our hearts. And sometimes we have to tear out things which in themselves are right and good—the love of one's nearest and best, for example; for that may be a hindrance sometimes; *is* almost always a hindrance in a land like India, and sometimes is so in a nominally Christian land like ours. "If a man hate not his father and mother," said Jesus in one of His sternest words, "he cannot be My disciple." It is a terribly narrow door—this door into the Kingdom—and a man has to agonise to enter in.

How narrow it is you see illustrated in specific cases in the New Testament. Take the case of that man who came to Jesus and said, "Lord, I will follow Thee; but suffer me first to go and bury my father." What more natural? What more filial? But Jesus' inexorable word was, "Leave the dead to bury their own dead, but go thou and publish abroad the Kingdom of

God." The man had to leave his father for the Kingdom of God's sake. Or take the story of the rich young ruler: "Go," said Jesus, "sell that thou hast and come follow Me." It was a demand that God should come even before his wealth. It was a demand that he should tear out of his soul the love of money. But the young ruler couldn't face the agony of it: "He went away sorrowful because he had great possessions."

At this point, I would like to call your attention to the difference in the verbs which Jesus uses in the first limb of the verse and the second, respectively. "Strive" (agonise) "to enter in by the narrow door: for many, I say unto you, shall *seek* to enter in, and shall not be able." The word translated "strive" is an infinitely stronger word than the word translated "seek." Mere "seeking" will never carry a man through the door. We have an old proverb to the effect that "if wishes were horses, beggars would ride." If wishing, desiring, longing for it, would see men through the door, multitudes would be inside. But men must be willing to pay the cost of entrance, and the cost is not "seeking," but "striving." If men could get through the door and carry their cherished sins along with them, they would crowd through it. But the condition is that they "put off the old man with his

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deeds"; that they repent, and they cannot face the agony of that. That was precisely the case with the rich young ruler. He "sought" to enter in. "Master," he said, "what shall I do to inherit eternal life?" There was a certain eagerness about him, for he came running to Jesus. But when confronted with the necessity of "striving," of "agonising," he couldn't do it; but remained without.

Lorenzo Medici, in his last illness, sent for Savonarola—the one priest who, he felt, would deal faithfully with him. He wanted absolution before he faced the end. And Savonarola told him there was forgiveness for him on certain conditions. The conditions were that even then he would seek to repair the wrong he had done and restore certain ill-gotten gains. And when the sick man heard that last demand he writhed in his bed and turned his back on Savonarola and gave him no answer, so that at length Savonarola left with the word of peace unspoken. Lorenzo would have liked to get in by the door if he could have got in without much effort. "He sought to enter in." But when asked to "repent," when told he couldn't take himself and that blood-stained gold of his through it, he shrank from paying that price. He could not face the pain of parting with his gold. He sought, but did not strive—and seeking is not enough.

This is the truth John Bunyan teaches in that great picture which he gives us in the *Pilgrim* of the crowd of men gathered about the palace gate. John Bunyan's picture is, indeed, nothing but this saying of our Lord's expanded and pictorialised in the Dreamer's inimitable way. What Christian saw was this: He saw the door of the Palace; and, behold, at the door stood a great company of men as desirous to go in, but durst not. There also sat a man at a little distance from the door, at a table-side, with a Book and his Ink-horn before him, to take the name of him that should enter therein. He saw also that in the doorway stood many men in armour to keep it, being resolved to do the men that would enter what hurt and mischief they could. And, at the sight, Christian was in a maze. For all the crowd of men hung back. They wanted to go in, but they dared not make the venture and face the struggle. And it was only one out of the whole mob of them—a man of a very stout countenance—who at last said to the man with the Ink-horn, "Set down my name, sir," and who, in spite of the wounds he received at the hands of the armed men, fought his way in. Many *sought* to enter; only one was prepared to "strive" to enter in. And there is no entrance without the striving. And all this in no way

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affects the truth that salvation is ultimately of grace, the free and amazing grace of God. But no one will continue in sin that grace may abound. God's grace in forgiving him will constrain him to put his sin clean away. Salvation, from one point of view, is free. From another point of view, it is a costly business. It cost God His only Son. It costs us this "agony" of ridding ourselves of the "old man" with all his passions and lust and desires. That is why Jesus, laying down the terms of discipleship, said, "If any man would come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his Cross and follow Me."

III

But if any man is willing to pay the price, if he is willing to "strive," the door is there open for him. Mr. Kipling, in his robust, not to say rombustious, way, says, somewhere, that if any one has not got out of life what he wished from it, it is clear proof, either that he did not really want it, or that he was unwilling to pay the price. Stated in that bald and uncompromising way, the dictum is far too sweeping to be true. It is the cheerful philosophy of the successful man, but it goes to pieces against the facts of life. The world is full of men who have striven and

failed—men who wanted to be some particular thing and who cheerfully paid the cost in the shape of labour, but who have never compassed their desire. There have been folk who have had literary aspirations; they have sweated and laboured over their writing; some have written poetry and some have written novels, and nobody has wanted either their poetry or their novels. There have been others who have been ambitious of a public career. They have worked hard to fit themselves for it. But, somehow, their ambitions have never been realised, and, instead of figuring prominently on the stage of our national life, they have to be content with the obscure place and the humble station.

People do not always get out of life what they want. In spite of labour and striving, life has disappointed multitudes. And yet, while stated as a general principle Kipling's dictum is far too sweeping, there is a big element of truth in it. Life *does* bestow its gifts upon men who really mean business and are willing to pay the price. The gate to what is counted "success" is a narrow gate; but if men are willing to "agonise," to sweat and strain and labour, they can generally enter in. Think of what some men have done to win education. Perhaps the greatest Welshman of the last generation was Sir Henry Jones: he ultimately succeeded

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Caird as Professor of Philosophy in Glasgow ; and, as Dr. Denny says, he became the most powerful influence in Scotland. The story of Henry Jones' early life is the story of an epic struggle against every imaginable difficulty. His father was a cobbler, and the only school in the remote village in which he was born was taught by a man who didn't know very much himself. And, even to that school, Henry Jones only went on alternate days. The other days he worked with his father in the shoemaker's shop. But his thirst for knowledge was insatiable, his resolve to acquire it indomitable. After working-hours, he would go with his books, sometimes into the empty and fireless chapel, sometimes to the cellar of a neighbouring hall where a brother was in charge of the heating arrangements. At one time he got up each morning at four. At another he and his brother took turns—he going to bed at eight and sleeping on till one, and then his brother waking him up and taking a turn himself. He worked himself ill. But upon gaining an education he was absolutely resolved. He “ strove ” and he entered in. He paid the price and won the prize on which his heart was set. J. M. Barrie is at the top of the literary tree to-day ; but listen to this statement of his : “ The greatest glory that has ever come to me was to be

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swallowed up in London, not knowing a soul, with no means of subsistence, and the fun of working till the stars went out." There speaks a man who was resolved not to be beaten—who *meant* to be a literary man and who was willing to pay the price.

The great places in life do not, as a rule, come to a man by luck or chance. They have to be worked for, laboured for, paid for. Those of us who occupy the humbler stations mustn't whimper or complain. We are where we are because we preferred the easier lot and were not willing to pay the high price in the way of toil and labour which is the cost of success. We would like to have won a great place, but we were not willing to *strive* for it. I say that is *generally* true in life. It is *always* true in the spiritual life. We can get what we want if we are willing to pay the price. That was the question with which Jesus challenged the sick man at the pool of Bethesda. "Wouldest thou be made whole?" or, as Dr. Moffatt translates it, "Do you want your health restored?" Do you want it—really want it? Because, if you really want it and are prepared to pay the price of it, you can have it. And that is the challenge He addresses to us: Do you really want to be made whole? Do you really want to become a good man? Do you

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really want eternal life? Because, if you really want them—want them so really that you are prepared to fulfil any conditions in order to get them—you can have them. Take this matter of membership in the Kingdom. You can have it if you want it. If you are willing to *strive* to enter in by the narrow door, admission is yours. No one is excluded who is willing to pay the price of striving. That, then, is the question: Are you willing to agonise? Are you so keen on the Kingdom that you are willing to pay the price?

We often criticise Salome and her two sons for the foolish and presumptuous request they made of Jesus, and I am not disposed to say that the criticism is unjustified. But my heart, in spite of everything, warms towards James and John. For if they desired thrones, they did not want them on the cheap. They wanted them so much that they were willing to pay the full price for them. For when Jesus confronted them with the cost, and asked them, “Are ye able to drink of the cup that I drink and to be baptised with the baptism wherewith I am baptised?” they replied quietly and simply, “We are able.” I don’t contend that they knew exactly what Jesus meant by “His cup” and “His baptism,” though I think they knew it meant suffering and loss of some kind; but they were quite decided

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upon this point: they were ready to suffer anything, and to make any sacrifice, to have a place beside Jesus in His Kingdom.

Well, there is a price still to be paid for the Kingdom.

Our flesh and sense must be denied
Passion and envy, lust and pride.

The question is: Are you ready to pay the price? The Kingdom is yours if you are willing to pay the cost of admission! The narrow door opens to every one who is willing to strive! "The Kingdom of God suffereth violence," and the violent—the men who are not afraid of risk and loss—take it by force. Jesus had a Kingdom offered to Him—at a price. The humble birth in Bethlehem was part of the price. The lowly years of toil in Nazareth were part of the price. The loneliness and homelessness of His preaching years were part of the price. His repudiation in Nazareth, His rejection in Jerusalem, were part of the price. The unbelief of His brethren and the treachery of Judas and the denial by Peter were part of the price. The spitting and the scourging, the buffeting and the mockery, were part of the price. And the nails and the cross and the cruel thirst and the outer darkness completed the cost. And Christ paid it all, to

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the uttermost farthing. The Kingdom of redeemed and regenerated souls was worth the cost. He tasted death for every man. For the joy that was set before Him He endured the Cross, despising shame.

And isn't membership in that Kingdom worth any price we may have to pay? Isn't it worth while to suffer the loss of every other thing if we may gain Christ? What will it profit us to gain the world and find ourselves outside the door? Well, are you ready to pay the price? "Strive to enter in by the narrow door."

THE PASSIVITY OF THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

GALATIANS iv. 9.—“But now that ye have come to know God, or rather to be known of God.”

DR. RUSSELL MALTBY, in an address he gave at the recent meetings of the Free Church Council at Bridlington, called attention to the fact that most of the verbs that are used to describe the method of our human salvation are in the passive voice. You may think, at first hearing, that that is a mere grammatical point and that it has no great truth to teach. But really the truth it suggests is a most vital one. It is this—that in this matter of salvation man is not so much the subject as the object. The work is not so much done *by* us as *upon* us. We are not so much agents as recipients. Salvation is not achieved by us, it is conferred upon us. It is not of works, it is the free gift of God.

The text I have just quoted is an illustration of what I mean. The Apostle is talking of the time when he first preached the Gospel of Christ crucified to the Galatians. Up to that time they did not know God, but were in bondage to them which by nature are no gods. “But

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now," says the Apostle, "that ye have come to know God," and then he corrects himself and says, "or rather to be known of God" Their conversion was not so much a case of their recognising God as of God recognising and choosing them. Their salvation was not their own work, it was God's work upon them. You have a similar correction from active to passive in Paul's letter to the Philippians, where, speaking of his own Christian life, he says that he presses on if so be that he may apprehend that for which also he was apprehended by Christ Jesus. The first "apprehension" was not Paul's, the first "apprehension" was Christ's. It was not Paul who laid hold of Christ; it was Christ who laid hold of him. On the way to Damascus, Christ had laid His mighty hand upon Paul, had grasped him, claimed him, made him His own. Ever since that memorable day, Paul had tried to grasp Christ's purpose for him and bravely to fulfil it; but Paul's grasp of Christ was secondary and subsidiary to Christ's grasp of Paul. That is where his Christian life began—"he was apprehended by Christ Jesus." That is the prevailing emphasis of the New Testament. God is the real agent; man is just the recipient.

But that is not the emphasis of these days of ours, is it? It is man's part in the work of salvation that we stress and underline. We

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lay the emphasis much more on human effort than we do on God's grace. The very words we use in our appeals illustrate what I mean, for they all suggest action on our part. We appeal to men to "choose" Christ, to "accept" Christ, to "decide" for Christ. And then we beg them to set about making a character for themselves, and we urge them to engage in some kind of service. It is a very energetic, strenuous Gospel we preach in these days, and the whole emphasis is laid upon human effort. And the result is, our Christian life is a little bit hectic and high-strung. We are feverishly busy, and more than a little fretful and anxious. We lack what the Methodists called "assurance." We are not quite sure of ourselves. We are worried because we "cannot read our title clear." We are often tortured with doubt as to our standing before God. We lack that wonderful serenity that people saw in the face of a woman like Elizabeth Fry. We are wanting in what the Americans call "poise." We don't possess the heart "garrisoned by the peace of God." And what we have to do, if we want to recover poise, serenity, quietness of spirit, assurance, is to remember God, to remember that He is the chief agent in the great work of our salvation—to fall back upon Him—to rest in Him. That is not, of course, to forget that

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we have our own part to play. We have to be workers together with God. But there is no rest of heart so long as we concentrate our thought upon our own efforts, for these efforts are so feeble and so spasmodic, and often so fruitless. Rest of heart comes by remembering God and the part He plays.

The first condition of rest—physical rest I mean now—is to be able to relax. There is no rest so long as limbs and nerves are kept taut and tense. I was talking not long since to a great specialist who has often to give evidence in the law courts. And he said to me that when he went into the witness-box the first thing he did was deliberately to relax, and, having so relaxed, he said, his mind and his tongue worked quite easily and naturally, and the strictest cross-examination never flurried him. And if we want rest of heart we, too, must relax. And to relax spiritually, to gain the quiet spirit, serenity of soul, what we need to do is to remember God ; that He is primary in the work of our redemption, that our redemption depends, not so much upon what we are or do, as upon what God is and does. We can only rest by resting in “ the Lord.”

Now, it is about this passivity of the Christian life, this fact that God is the real agent and that we are recipients, that I want to speak for a few

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minutes. It may help to banish anxieties and nervous fears and bring into our troubled hearts something of the peace of God.

I

Let me start with the very beginnings of our human redemption—that which made our redemption possible. It starts with the love of God. Not our love for God, but God's love for us. Any love we have for God is but the response to God's love for us. "We love Him because He first loved us." He first! The first love was His. "He first loved us!" I don't know how far back that word "first" carries us; perhaps outside the range of our earthly time. I think when God made man He foresaw the possibility of his going astray. He could not make *man* without incurring that risk. A man who didn't possess freedom—a freedom which he might even misuse—would not be a man at all, but a machine. And if you ask me why He created man, I reply: He created him for love. Love always seeks an object. Love cannot exist in solitude. Just because God is love, He wanted beings whom He could love. And so He made man in His own image. It was only a being made in His own image—a being dowered with moral sense—whom God

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could love, because he alone could love Him in return. God can take delight in sun and stars, but He cannot love them. He can rejoice in the works of His hands, but He cannot love them. Love is a reciprocal relation. And it is a relation between *free* beings. There is nothing coerced or constrained about love. There is no such thing as a compelled love. Love is a spontaneous emotion, free and unfettered as the wind. God might have got obedience from a human automaton, but not love. Because God wanted objects to love, He made men, and because He wanted their love in return, He made them free. He knew that they might use their freedom to refuse Him their love and to rebel against His will—but such was God's love that when He created men He had also His plan to save them from the results of their misuse of freedom. God's love was not content simply to *create*; from the very first it was resolved to *save*.

It was a costly business, this business of saving. But God's love was so great it was willing to pay the price. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten son that whosoever believeth on Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." And it wasn't just at the date of Jesus' birth that God gave His Son. Jesus was the Lamb slain from the

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foundation of the world. God's sacrifice was an eternal sacrifice. The Cross was in His heart long before it was set up on Calvary's hill. And it is with that deep, sacrificial love of God that man's redemption begins. God first! Indeed, from one point of view, redemption is all of God, first and last. It is all the result of God's love. God has done everything, and man has nothing to do but to receive. And the heart of the Gospel consists, not in an appeal to man to love God, but in the proclamation to men of what the love of God has done for them.

II

It is God's amazing love that has made redemption *possible*. He made it possible for all when He gave His Son to die upon the cross. I want to go on now to say He is foremost in the work of making redemption *actual*. Redemption becomes actual when God and man come together—when the child comes home and the Father prints upon his brow the kiss of welcome. Now, we hear a great deal about the "Quest for God." There is something in the human soul that refuses to be satisfied till it finds God. "My soul is athirst for God," says one of the psalmists, "yea, even for the living God: when shall I come and appear before God." "Oh that I knew where I might find Him,"

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cries the perplexed and troubled Job, "then would I come even to His seat." Those were seekers of the early days. And men are seeking still. Do you remember George Borrow's story of those gipsies whom he came across outside Chester and who said to him, "O sir, do give us God, for we are sinful people! Give us God, give us God." And Borrow, who was neither priest nor minister, not knowing what to do or say, flung some money to the children and departed. And the gipsies screamed after him, "We do not want your money, sir; we have plenty of money. Give us God! Give us God!" And, again—according to Dr. Stanley Jones—away in India yonder, Gandhi and many another are seeking for God. It is a search from which for the human soul there is no release—for, to use Augustine's oft-quoted words, "God has made us for Himself and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Him." "Give us God" is the cry of the universal human heart.

But searching is one thing and finding is another. The fact that men are searching for God would not bring me much comfort if I could not say something else and something better—God is also searching for men. Man is not the only seeker—God is seeking too. That is the truth that Jesus emphasised. I dare say the sheep who got lost—if with its silly brain

it could think at all—wished itself safely back with the others in the security of the fold. But it could never have found its way back of itself. Its chance of deliverance lay in this fact—that the Shepherd had missed it and was out looking for it. “He goeth after the one lost sheep until He find it.” There is not only the seeking sinner, there is also the seeking Saviour. God is on the look-out for us! God will not let us go! God will not give us up!

“Lord, Thou hast here Thy ninety and nine ;
Are they not enough for Thee ?”
But the Shepherd made answer, “This of Mine
Has wandered away from Me ;
And although the road be rough and steep
I go to the desert to find My sheep.”

The seeking is not all on one side! God is seeking! Indeed, what is the human quest but really the reflex and result of the Divine seeking? That is a true word which A. C. Benson says in one of his books: “When we begin to seek, we become aware of a much larger fact—that one is being sought by Some One else, sought, not as a dog may trace a wounded creature through the grass and lose the scent at last, but sought patiently and faithfully.” That is true! Those very hungers of the soul, those stirrings of conscience, those dissatisfactions with earthly things, which we interpret

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as signs of the quest of the soul for God, are they not, rather, signs of God's quest for us? For is it not God who stirs up those hungers and reproaches and dissatisfactions within us? Yes, it is really God who is seeking. When a person comes to me or writes to me and tells me he is unhappy, that he hears about God but cannot find Him—I know God is seeking that man. The very unhappiness and restlessness of which he complains is proof that God has got His hand upon him. And my confidence that God and man will at length meet, that love will answer love, rests on the fact, not that man is looking for God, but that God is looking for man. I can believe that old promise: "He that seeketh, findeth"—for the seeking Saviour will not cease His search till He has found the sheep which was lost.

And all through the mountains thunder riven,
And up from the rocky steep,
There rose a cry to the gate of Heaven:
"Rejoice, I have found My sheep."

III

I pass on now to speak of God's part in the support and maintenance of the Christian life. It was God's love that made redemption possible; it was His patient seeking of us that made

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redemption actual; and it is still God who maintains and keeps us amid all the dangers and besetments of the Christian life. That was a great word which Jesus spoke for the comfort of His disciples when He said, "Ye did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you." We put the emphasis in the wrong place when we talk about our choosing Christ. What really matters is the amazing fact that Christ has chosen us. There lies the real secret of security. For days come to us when we become doubtful whether we have really chosen Christ at all. Christian people have their ups and down—their days of exaltation and their days of depression, their days when they are exalted to the third heaven, and their days when they have no open vision. I have often come across good Christian people who were doubtful of their own standing, because, at the moment, they seemed to have lost their grip of Christ. We are creatures of moods and feelings. That hymn of ours which begins :

'Twixt gleams of joy and clouds of doubt,
Our feelings come and go,
Our best estate is tossed about,
In ceaseless ebb and flow,

exactly describes our case. What we need to remember for our comfort is that what really

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matters is not our grip of Christ, but Christ's grip of us. It is that which ensures our safety. For that grip never relaxes. Even when we seem to have clean lost our hold of Him, He has not lost His hold of us. "No one can pluck you out of My hands." "Ye did not choose Me, but I chose you." And it is on Christ's part in keeping us, in the interests of our own peace of mind, we ought to lay the emphasis.

Let me no more my comfort draw
From my frail hold of Thee ;
In this alone rejoice with awe—
Thy mighty grasp of me.

I am not forgetting that there are, in the New Testament, exhortations to personal effort and striving. Recall, for example, the exhortations St. Paul addresses to Timothy, exhortations to courage and resolution and fortitude and loyalty. "Suffer hardship with Me" ; "Fight the good fight of the faith" ; "Be strong in the grace which is in Christ Jesus" ; "O Timothy, guard that which was committed unto thee." And, of course, we have our part to play. We have to "strive" to enter in by the narrow gate. We have to be steadfast, unmovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord. And yet our safety amidst all the temptations of which life is full does not depend on our own

courage or strength of will. It depends on the keeping care of God.

There was no braver and more undaunted spirit than St. Paul. There was no man of stronger resolution and more unflinching courage than he. And yet, when I read these letters of his, I find that it was not on his own courage and resolution that St. Paul depended, but on the keeping grace of God. "I know Him whom I have believed," he wrote to Timothy, "and I am persuaded that He is able to guard that which I have committed unto Him against that day." HE is able to guard ! It was in God's power to keep that he rested. And that is the doxology with which Jude closes his brief Epistle : "Now unto Him that is able to guard you from stumbling, and to set you before the presence of His glory without blemish in exceeding joy, to the only God our Saviour, be glory, majesty, dominion, and power." His confidence of being kept until all the trials of earth were past, and Heaven was reached, was that about him was the keeping care of God. And that is the way to peace of heart for us—the remembrance of God and His guardian care. Life will always be a chequered thing of doubts and fears so long as we only think of our own hold of God. For that hold is often limp and feeble. I have heard people say that in their times of weakness and

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sickness they cannot even think of God at all. But God is always thinking of us. And, from that mighty love of His, neither death nor life, nor things present nor things to come, shall ever be able to separate us. So let us stay our minds upon God.

Out of that weak, unquiet drift
Which comes but to depart,
To that pure Heaven my spirit lift
Where Thou unchanging art.
Lay hold of me with Thy strong grasp,
Let Thy Almighty arm
In its embrace my weakness clasp,
And I shall fear no harm.

IV

And, for my last point, I want to say that all this holds good in the matter of our Christian service. In all our toil, we are but working together with God. God is, if I may so express it, the senior partner. And it is the fact that He works in us, and through us, that alone makes our work effective. "Work out your own salvation," said St. Paul to his Philippian converts, "with fear and trembling," and then he immediately added, "for it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure." That was what made it worth while to work at all—because God was working

in them. There lay the promise of the success of their toil—God was working in them. They had, probably, great difficulties to face, great obstacles to overcome—but, with God working in them, nothing was impossible to them. “With five shillings,” said St. Teresa to some people who mocked at her idea of building an orphanage, seeing that five shillings was all she possessed—“with five shillings Teresa can do nothing, but with five shillings and God there is nothing Teresa cannot do.”

Have you not been struck in reading the New Testament by the buoyancy and dash and gaiety of the early Christians as they faced a hostile world? The reason of it all was this—they knew that God was with them, that the excellency of the power was of God and not of themselves. They were conscious enough of their own inadequacy, of their own lack of influence and lack of learning, but, in spite of it all, they went everywhere preaching the word with supreme confidence because they knew God was working in them. And that is the truth we need to remember in these days, if our work is to be courageous and effective. *Service* is the watchword of this day of ours. It has almost, indeed, become a catchword. We are intent on *doing* things. The Church is intent on *doing* things. In all the centuries

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of its existence the Church has never been so busy. It has never been engaged in such multifarious activities. And yet, somehow, we are strangely ineffective. We accomplish very little. We make slight impression upon the world. Indeed, in spite of all our activities, the world seems to be slipping away from the influence of the Church. And sometimes we get despondent and depressed as a result, and we begin to wonder what the future of the Church is going to be. To revive our hope and courage, that is what we need to remember—"it is God that worketh in you both to will and to do." We become timid and doubtful when we forget God. When we remember Him, we become strong and buoyant, for He will not fail nor be discouraged. And it is the same remembrance that is going to make our work effective. Sometimes I wonder whether our present ineffectiveness is due to the fact that we are depending simply on ourselves, our own ability and talent and skill. What we need to learn is that Paul may plant, Apollos may water—but it is only God who can give the increase. So that perhaps what we want more than anything else just now is to make room for God. That means that we quietly wait upon Him until He comes and takes possession of us. Perhaps what we need to make our work

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effective is less fussiness, less activity, and more prayer. For still it is true we receive power when the Holy Ghost is come upon us—when we make room so that God may work in us both to will and to do for His good pleasure.

So there the great truth stands, a truth which for our own happiness and comfort we need to learn—God is the real agent, man is the recipient. It was God's love that first found a way of redemption ; it is God who seeks His lost and wandering children ; it is God who keeps us ; it is God who empowers us. Everything starts with God. Everything depends upon God. And to remember this loving, seeking, keeping, empowering God is the way to serenity and peace. We get anxious and troubled when we only gaze at ourselves and our own resources. But we become confident about ourselves and about the world when we remember the loving, seeking, keeping God. The Lord is my light and my salvation : whom shall I fear ? The Lord is the strength of my life ; of whom shall I be afraid ?



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A Christmas Sermon

ROMANS. xii. 8.—“He that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.”

THIS chapter is a chapter about Christian duty. The Apostle gives in it his instructions as to how Christian people ought to comport themselves in the various activities of life. For there is a distinctly Christian way of doing most things, and the Christian way is the only way that is open to the Christian man. It is not a case simply of abstaining from things which in themselves are essentially and intrinsically wrong. If you will scan the verses through, you will see that they contain very few prohibitions. It is a case of doing one's duty in a Christian way. For there is a right and wrong way of doing even right things. Things which in themselves are right may be spoiled by being done in the wrong way. Deeds which in themselves are beneficent and good may lose all their grace by being done in the wrong spirit. Of course our first concern must be to see to it that what we do is in itself right—but second only in importance to the character of the deed is the way in which we do it. And the Christian way is the great way, the generous

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way, the magnificent way. We have an old proverb about "spoiling the ship for a ha'porth of tar," letting a good and noble thing be spoiled for lack of the finishing touch. Now, the Christian will always supply the "finishing touch." He will not spoil a good deed by doing it ungraciously. He will not be content simply with doing fine things. He will do his fine things in the finest possible way.

That is the point that the Apostle is insisting upon in these verses. I don't think it would be a false description of them to describe them as a lesson in Christian "manners." Notice the exhortations of this text of mine: "He that giveth," he says, "let him do it with liberality," or, rather, "with singleness of mind." Giving is a Christian duty. No Christian must forget his obligation to care for the needy and the sick and the poor. But there is a right and a wrong way of giving. A gift may be so given—in a grudging spirit and to the accompaniment of harsh words—that its effect is to hurt and wound the recipient. On the other hand, a gift may be so bestowed that the manner of its bestowment shall do more for the recipient than the gift itself. Do you remember that story (I think it is Tolstoy who tells it) about a man stopping to bestow an alms upon a beggar, and finding, to his dismay, that he had nothing in his pockets?

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He began stammering out his apologies. "I am sorry, brother," he said, "but I have nothing, brother." But that word "brother" was more to the beggar than any money he could have given. "Never mind, brother," was the beggar's reply, "that too was a gift, brother."

Then gifts may not only be offered in the wrong spirit—much as one would fling a bone to a dog—but they may also be given from the wrong motive. That is what the Apostle has specially in mind here. He that giveth, let him do it with simplicity; with singleness of mind. Giving, when not inspired by the single motive of love and a desire to help, ceases to be giving at all. And what a vast amount of giving is vitiated in that way! Ananias and Sapphira "gave," but not with "simplicity."—they gave in order to win a reputation for liberality equal to that of Barnabas. They gave, not out of love for the poor, but out of a desire for self-glorification. There are people nowadays who give large sums to charities, to hospitals and orphanages and excellent institutions of that kind, not simply out of a desire to help such charities, but in the hope that some recognition may come to them in the shape of public honour. Giving almost ceases to be giving in such a case, and degenerates into purchase. Christian giving must be done without any thought of personal

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advantage or gain, but simply out of a single desire to help men and glorify God. "He that giveth, let him do it with singleness of mind." "He that ruleth with diligence"—whether the sphere of his rule be the family or the Church or the State—"with diligence," with zeal, and energy. The Christian man will not "slack" in his duties. There have been rulers both in Church and State who have not been "diligent," with the result that things have fallen into something like anarchy and chaos. "Woe unto the land whose king is a child," says one of the Old Testament writers—a child in wisdom and knowledge, he means; for such a person cannot rule "with diligence," and the land suffers as a consequence. Charles II fooled about with his mistresses instead of ruling "with diligence," with the result that England touched a depth of shame and abasement never reached either before or since. Some men envy and covet the ruler's place for the power and public honour it brings. The Christian man, if he is set in such a place, will think little or nothing of the personal honour or glory; he will only seek to discharge his duties with diligence.

And then comes the clause of my text upon which I want to concentrate your attention for a few minutes further: "he that sheweth

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mercy, with cheerfulness." "With cheerfulness"—and the word so translated is really our English word "hilarity." "He that sheweth mercy, with hilarity." My dictionary defines hilarity as "boisterous mirth, merriment, jollity." It is a sort of exuberant joy. And the Christian man is to shew mercy, with hilarity, as if he were finding tremendous joy in it—if you will pardon the expression, as if it were the greatest fun in the world. It is of no use showing mercy in a grudging manner and with a sour face; if we want to "shew mercy" in the Christian way, we shall show it with smiles and laughter and a shining face. It is a good thing to "shew mercy"; but the Christian will "shew mercy" in the Christian way, and that is "with hilarity"—as if he enjoyed it, with the kind of spirit which makes the recipient feel that he is not only receiving a blessing, but by the act of receiving he is also conferring one upon the giver. That is the only way to "shew mercy" if it is to carry healing and comfort along with it.

To see the beauty of a stained-glass window there must be light shining through it. A passer-by in the daytime, should he chance to look up and notice the great west window of this Church, would perhaps see little in the window itself to admire. Indeed, with those wavy lead

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divisions, made necessary by the pictures, it might seem less attractive to him than the perfectly plain windows. But should he pass at night and chance to look up, he would suddenly realise that the window was a thing of beauty—for, lit up by the light within, all its glowing richness of colour would stand revealed. His gaze would then centre, not on the plain-glass windows, but on that window with its glorious reds and blues and crimsons. The light within transfigures the window from a dull, uninteresting thing into a thing of splendour and of glory. And a deed of mercy done with a sour face and a grudging spirit is like that stained-glass window without any light behind. No doubt it is a good thing, but there is nothing winsome or attractive about it, and it never makes men worship and adore. But a deed of mercy done “with cheerfulness,” “with hilarity,” with gladness and smiles and laughter, is not simply a good thing—it becomes a beautiful thing, a radiant thing, a thing which, by its sheer loveliness, melts and subdues, charms and takes captive, blesses and heals, the human heart. The *way* in which we do a good thing is almost as important as the thing itself. The fine thing must be done in a fine way. And this is the Christian way of “shewing mercy”: “he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.”

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Now, what exactly does the Apostle mean by "shewing mercy"? Well, in answering that question, I venture to think that the phrase ought not to be restricted or limited in any way. I don't suppose the Apostle himself had any particular action in his mind. Sanday and Headlam, in their great commentary, paraphrase the sentence thus: "Let any man or woman who performs deeds of mercy in the Church do so brightly and cheerfully." Any kind deed is a deed of mercy. But it is legitimate, in order to bring out the meaning of the exhortation, to illustrate it by specific instances of deeds of mercy.

I

And I want to begin by taking that particular deed of mercy suggested by Dr. Moffatt's translation. For this is how he translates the sentence: "The sick visitor must be cheerful." Now, in so translating the phrase and making "shewing mercy" equivalent to the visitation of the sick, I think Dr. Moffatt is unduly limiting it. But the visitation of the sick is certainly a deed of mercy. Perhaps that was the form that "shewing mercy" oftenest took in the early Church. You remember that one of the things that the glorified Lord says to the blessed

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who are summoned to inherit the Kingdom—one of the reasons He gives for conferring such blessedness upon them—is this, “I was sick and ye visited Me.” Under the inspiration of that word, Christian people in those early days gave themselves with wonderful zeal and tenderness to the task of visiting the sick—not only their own sick, but anybody who might be in sickness and pain. They did it for Christ’s sake, and rejoiced that in ministering to them they were ministering to their Lord. The visitation of the sick is still one way of “shewing mercy.” Jesus still identifies Himself with His suffering people, and by ministering to them we minister to Him. But, if we are to visit the sick so as to make our visits helpful, we must do so with cheerfulness. There is something healing and helpful in the very sight of a sunny face. The doleful, dismal person had better keep out of the sick-room. He does far more harm than good. He had better wait until he gets some of the joy of the Lord into his soul. To visit the sick is a Christian thing to do, but to make it a real ministry it must be done in the right way. “The sick visitor must be cheerful.” I read in an essay, this last week, about a man who said he suffered from “sunshine hunger.” Heart, soul, and mind, he said, cried out for sunshine. And that is what sick

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folk crave for too—sunshine. And the Christian man can give it. Perhaps only he can give it. Sometimes, quite obviously, the earthly day of the patient is drawing to a close. “Being cheerful” in such a case does not mean being boisterously optimistic, giving the patient, metaphorically, a slap on the back and saying, “Cheer up; you will soon be about again.” That is not being kind; it is being cruel. Being cheerful in such a case means bringing the radiant hope of eternal life with you, so that the sick man shall see the sun breaking through the darkness and at eventide it shall be light. That is the Christian’s business—to carry with him to the sick and suffering the assurance of the love of God and the life beyond. There is no cheer for fainting hearts to be compared to that. The sick visitor must be cheerful.

II

Next let me take that word “mercy” in its strictly literal sense of forgiveness and pardon. Let him that sheweth mercy, do it with cheerfulness. Let him do his forgiving as if he enjoyed it. That is the only kind of mercy that does any good; it is the only kind of forgiveness that is a real forgiveness at all. That is one of the gracious influences of this

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Christmas season—it moves us to think kindly of those with whom we have differed and from whom we have been alienated. We hear the angels sing about peace and goodwill, and we are in the mood to forget old quarrels and to patch up broken friendships; to do a little in the “peace and goodwill” way on our own account. We are all of us a little bit more genuinely Christian at Christmas than we are at any other period of the year.

Now, to forgive is an elementary Christian obligation. Our Lord has said that God’s forgiveness of us (what a lot He has to forgive!) depends on our forgiveness of our fellows. If we forgive not men their trespasses, neither will our Father forgive us our trespasses. But, even when we acknowledge the obligation of forgiveness, we have to realise that there is a right and a wrong way of forgiving. The right way of forgiving is to do it royally, splendidly, magnificently—to forgive without reserves, to forgive and to forget, to forgive gladly and joyously. “He that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.” But many people forgive grudgingly—they forgive stingily—and thereby take all the grace and joy out of the forgiveness. They say, “I forgive you—but take care you do not do it again.” Or, “I forgive you, but I can’t forget.” Or, “I forgive you, but you can’t expect me to

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trust you as I did." There are illustrations of this grudging kind of forgiveness in this Bible of ours. David pretended to forgive Joab for his many crimes. But he had really never forgiven him at all. In his last charge to Solomon he recalled those deeds of Joab which had rankled in his mind. And so with Shimei, who had cursed him as he fled before Absalom. He pretended to forgive him, but he never forgot. I have called that an imperfect forgiveness—it was really not forgiveness at all. It is not forgiveness if we continue to cherish memories of wrongs. Supposing God only forgave like that! But God forgives and forgets! He blots out our sins. He casts our transgressions behind His back and remembers them no more against us for ever. There is nothing petty or mean or grudging about God's forgiving. He forgives royally, absolutely, utterly. And we have to forgive as God forgives—with the same lavishness and completeness. We have to forgive and forget. We have to forgive and forget and restore! Let us repair our sundered friendships at this blessed season. Let us clasp hands in love once again! And let there be nothing grudging or niggling about our forgiveness. Let it be a whole-hearted forgiveness! Let us restore those from whom we have been alienated to the old place of affection and love.

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That is the kind of forgiveness that heals and saves. Let us do this fine thing in the fine way :
“ He that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.”

III

And now let me take the phrase in its very broadest sense. If we have any deed of kindness to do—no matter what it may be—let us do it as if we enjoyed it, as if it gave us the keenest sort of pleasure. Let us take delight in it ! It is then goodness becomes really charming, when expressing itself in it there is an eager and happy spirit. Here is Christmas with us once again—and Christmas is marked by a kind of outburst of beneficence. We give presents to one another. We think of absent friends. We remember our poorer neighbours. It is all very beautiful and delightful when it issues from a loving heart. But I imagine some people find Christmas more than a bit of a nuisance. As a matter of simple decency, they are bound to do something in the way of giving. But they cut it down to the barest limit, and what they do they do grudgingly. They get annoyed by the multitude of appeals which Christmas brings with it, even though they do not respond to any of them. Such people know nothing of the fun of Christmas, and such gifts as they

make don't carry very much pleasure with them.

They are in the condition Scrooge was in before the spirits appeared to him—the Scrooge who wouldn't give a subscription to make a happy Christmas for the poor; the Scrooge who accused Bob Cratchit of robbing him of a day because Christmas Day was a holiday; the Scrooge who called Christmas humbug and who wouldn't go to his nephew's for his Christmas dinner. But Scrooge *after* the visits of the spirits is the man to imitate—the Scrooge who gives with his two hands, with a certain lavishness and extravagance; the Scrooge who sent the prize turkey to Bob Cratchit's, “not the little prize turkey, but the big one”; the Scrooge who gave the boy half a crown to go and bring the turkey to him within five minutes; the Scrooge who, meeting the old gentleman whose appeals he had so ruthlessly refused the day before, takes his breath away by the largeness of the subscription he offered; the Scrooge who turned up at his nephew's after all, and who was at home with everybody in five minutes, and who had such a wonderful party; the Scrooge who, next morning, gave Bob Cratchit such a dig in the ribs as almost sent him staggering into the tank, and said, “I am not going to stand this sort of thing any longer, and therefore I am about to

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raise your salary." What a Christmas Scrooge had, and what a Christmas he gave! For that is the quality of "mercy" which comes from a glad heart. "It is twice blest. It blesses him who gives and him who takes.

It has become almost a convention with some of our novelists to depict the man who has a heart of gold as being rough and rude in speech, while the villain is generally represented as smooth-tongued and pleasant-mannered. It is a stupid and foolish convention. It puts a premium on bad manners. It is a good thing to have a heart of gold—it is, if you like, the essential thing—but why half spoil the kindliness of the heart by rough and harsh speech? Goldsmith, apologising for Dr. Johnson's occasional rudenesses, said of him, "He has nothing of the bear but his skin." But why wear even the skin of the bear? Why take away from the kindliness of a deed by caustic speech or roughness of manner? The kindly, sympathetic word often does more good than the material gift. The one ministers to the body, the other to the soul. At any rate, the Christian will seek to match his kindliness of heart with kindliness of speech and manner. He will do his fine things in the fine way. "He that sheweth mercy, let him do it with cheerfulness."

IV

And in exhorting us, when we shew mercy, to do so with cheerfulness, the Apostle is only exhorting us to act after the Divine pattern. For God is a God who "shews mercy." He does so on the grand scale. He keeps mercy "for thousands," says the old Book. He shews mercy royally, lavishly, magnificently. Mercy is the greatest gift even God could bestow upon mankind. For it includes pardon, reconciliation, restoration—all, indeed, that we embrace in that great word "salvation." And God "shews mercy" in such a gracious way. There is nothing niggling or grudging, or half-hearted about it. He does His fine thing in the finest possible way. "He delighteth in mercy." He sheweth mercy with cheerfulness, with a kind of Divine hilarity.

Consider it, to begin with, on the *world scale*. The mercy of God to the world found expression in the great event which this day celebrates—when God sent His Son into the world to save the world. There was nothing *constrained* about that great and tremendous event. God didn't send His Son because He was *compelled* to do it. God sent Jesus and Jesus came because both delighted in mercy. No doubt there was

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pain and shame involved in it all—for the cradle carried the Cross along with it. But the great sacrifice was cheerfully made. “ I delight to do Thy will, O my God.” Indeed, if you will not think me irreverent for saying so, I think there was a sort of beautiful hilarity in Heaven on the night on which Jesus was born—for the joy of the angels could not be kept within bounds that night, so that mortal ears heard them praising God and saying, “ Glory to God in the highest.” It was not a night of tears and lamentation in Heaven—the night on which Jesus was born—it was a night on which all the halls of Zion were jubilant with song. God shewed mercy with a certain Divine hilarity.

Consider it, again, on the *individual scale* and the truth still holds good. Jesus was continually “ shewing mercy ” when He was here on the earth. They called Him “ the friend of publicans and sinners.” And His mercy was always royal, lavish, unreserved. There was nothing grudging about it. And there were no hard words to take away from its grace. “ Thy sins are forgiven thee ; go in peace,” He said to the woman who had sobbed her penitence over His feet. Not a word of reproof, no reminder of her shameful past, only that gracious word of pardon, full and unreserved. “ He also,” He said of Zacchæus, the chief publican.

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"is a son of Abraham." Jesus delighted to "shew mercy," and He forgave in a royal way. "He shewed mercy, with cheerfulness." And so God shews mercy still. It is all pictured for us in the Prodigal Son's story. When he was in the far country all he dared hope for was a kind of grudging and half-hearted forgiveness. "Make me as one of thy hired servants"—that was the extent of his hope. But, when he reached home, what his Father said was this, "Bring forth the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and shoes on his feet . . . for this my son was dead and is alive again, and was lost and is found." It was no half-hearted forgiveness the father gave, but a complete, an absolute, an unreserved forgiveness. He restored him to the son's place. And he delighted in the doing of it. "Let us eat and make merry," he said. There was music and dancing in the house that day. The father shewed mercy, "with hilarity." And that is just a picture of how God forgives—only it is a picture that falls short of the reality. He forgives with a lavish and complete forgiveness. It is royal, magnificent, absolute. And He delights to do it. "There is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth." The exercise of God's forgiving grace fills Heaven with a

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Divine hilarity. He sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

Well, we are to be imitators of God as dear children. So, on this day which reminds us of the great mercy of God to us, let us also shew mercy—let us remember the sick and the poor, let us forgive one another, let us do the good we can—and let us do it with a cheerful spirit, not grudgingly or of necessity, but with a glad heart and free. Let us do our good and fine things in the finest way. Let us shew mercy with cheerfulness—so shall we make Christmas Christmas indeed, and so shall we ourselves become sons of that Father in Heaven who with lavish kindness makes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends His rain on the just and the unjust.

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